The nature and status of religious belief in contemporary Britain (with particular reference to the concept of 'truth') as reflected by acts of collective worship in a sample of Luton schools since the 1988 Educational Reform Act.

Cheetham, Richard Ian

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A thesis submitted to the University of London for the degree of Ph.D. by the Ven. Richard Ian Cheetham M.A., P.G.C.E., Cert. Theol.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to produce a critical description and analysis of the understanding of religious belief (with particular reference to the concept of 'truth') which underlies the current practice of collective worship in schools.

The research is based on a sample of twelve schools which makes no pretence at being random, but is broadly representative of state education in Luton between the ages of 5 and 16. The study was conducted primarily within the qualitative, interpretive tradition of social research, using the method of 'verstehen', and the 'grounded theory' approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967). The main sources of data were semi-structured interviews with teachers who lead collective worship, participant observation, and the relevant official documents. There was also a brief questionnaire.

The research data was, in grounded theory terminology, 'saturated' with four major themes: inclusivity; freedom of choice and personal integrity; the location of the heart of collective worship in moral exhortation, individual reflection, personal spirituality, and 'worthship' rather than in traditional worship; and the powerful influence and leeway of the individual teacher.

A critical analysis of these themes leads to the conclusion that the understanding of religious belief which underlies the current practice of collective worship in this sample of schools sees it as an **individually chosen, private, practical guide to living** - in the terminology of grounded theory this is the 'core category'. This has the conseqences that religious belief is also treated as relative and as subjective. It is further argued that the teachers are operating primarily within a liberal, rationalist understanding of both education and religious belief. This understanding is coming under attack from several directions and looks increasingly unlikely to be able to provide an adequate framework for collective worship in a genuinely plural and postmodern world.

CONTENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACT - Association of Christian Teachers

ATL - Association of Teachers and Lecturers

CARE - Christian Action Research and Education

CEM - Christian Education Movement

CES - Catholic Education Service

CJEPC - Churches' Joint Education Policy Committee

DES - Department for Education and Science

DFE - Department for Education

DfEE - Department for Education and Employment

ERA 1988 - Education Reform Act 1988

LEA - Local Education Authority

MEF - Muslim Education Forum

MET - Muslim Education Trust

NCC - National Curriculum Council (subsequently SCAA, then QCA)

NAHT - National Association of Headteachers

NASACRE - National Association of SACREs.

NUT - National Union of Teachers

OFSTED - Office for Standards in Education

PCFRE - Professional Council For Religious Education

QCA - Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (formerly SCAA, formerly NCC)

RI - Religious Instruction

RE - Religious Education

SACRE - Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education

SCAA - Schools' Curriculum and Assessment Authority (previously NCC, subsequently QCA)

SHA - Secondary Heads' Association

TES - *Times Educational Supplement*

METHODS OF REFERENCING

Method of referencing to sample schools and teachers interviewed

Each of these references consists of:

* a letter or letters denoting the type of school - I for Infant, J for Junior, cJ for Church Junior, P for Primary, H for High, cH for Church High.

* three numbers separated by decimal points - the first number denotes the school, the second the teacher from that school, and the third the page on the interview transcript from which the quotation is taken.

e.g. I1.3.5

A full list is given in appendix one, which includes brief details of each school.

References from the wider literature

The Harvard system has been used.

A NOTE ON INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

In the absence in the English language of a suitable inclusive pronoun to denote either he or she, I have adopted the conventional use of 'he' to denote either, unless the sense clearly indicates the masculine use is intended.

PART ONE

AIMS, BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this introductory chapter is twofold: firstly, to describe the aim and scope of this study; and, secondly, to give an account of its broad, general context from four different angles - sociological, philosopical, theological and educational.

THE AIM AND SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

My aim is to produce a description and critical analysis of the understanding of religious belief which underlies the current practice of collective worship in a sample of Luton schools. In particular, I investigate how the teachers who lead such worship are regarding the question of the 'truth' of religious belief, including a consideration of the extent to which religious belief in this context is regarded as: private or public, individual or communal, subjective or objective, cognitive or non-cognitive, relative or absolute. In addition to these characterisations, part of the aim of the study is to see whether or not new ways of understanding religious belief are being forged in the crucible of collective worship in schools. This context is a critical one for the understanding of the nature of religious belief in wider society because it is one of the few places where religious belief has to be handled in an official and public way.

There have been major changes both in the practice and in the underlying understanding of acts of collective worship in county schools since they were first made compulsory in the 1944 Education Act. The 1988 Education Reform Act and its aftermath brought the issues to the surface and a sharp debate ensued about the place of collective worship in schools. One of the reasons the debate has been so contentious and difficult is that the mere existence of acts of collective worship in county schools raises many profound questions about the nature and status of religious belief in contemporary Britain. Substantial changes have occurred since 1944 in the religious make-up of this country: in

particular, it is frequently said that British society is now plural, multi-faith and postmodern in character, and there has also been a major debate over the degree to which British society can be said to be secular. There have been many significant studies of these changes which have approached the issues from a variety of perspectives: sociological (e.g. Wilson 1966, Davie 1994, Francis and Kay 1995, Bruce 1995); theological (e.g. D'Costa 1986, Hick 1989, Newbigin 1989, Race 1993, O'Leary 1996); philosophical (e.g. Connor 1989, Sacks 1995); and educational (e.g. Roger 1982, Sealey 1985, Watson 1987, Usher and Edwards 1994). Some of these will be looked at in more detail in the following sections on the general context of the study.

Collective worship occurs within this extremely complex context. There is profound dissatisfaction with the current situation in collective worship and there have been several calls for widespread discussion which recognise that the deeper issues must be addressed if any progress is to be made (e.g. OFSTED 1994a). A major initiative in 1997 entitled 'Collective Worship Reviewed' (RE Council of England and Wales et al. 1998), which drew together a wide variety of interested parties, revealed the continuing problems of achieving a real broad consensus on collective worship policy. Although debate and discussion have abounded there has been surprisingly little research into the practice and theory of collective worship. A further part of the aim of this study is to contribute to the vexed discussion about policy on collective worship and it has been undertaken in the belief that the collective worship debate will continue to flounder without both a serious analysis of the underlying issues and more research into what is actually happening in practice.

The methodology of the study will be fully explicated in chapter three, but in brief it is as follows. It is based on fieldwork done in a sample of twelve Luton schools involving participant observation, semi-structured interviews with the teachers who lead collective worship, and a brief questionnaire to those teachers. I have also examined the plethora of official literature which surrounds collective worship (e.g. government legislation,

circulars and other papers; local authority guidelines; and individual school policies etc.). The study is a qualitative one and has adopted a 'grounded theory' approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) which seeks to generate theory in a reflexive manner from data collected in the field. As it seeks to describe and analyse the concepts and understandings of the teachers who actually lead collective worship, it falls mainly into the 'interpretive' approach to sociological research.

This study is also using the concept of 'truth' as a tool to analyse the respective understandings of religious belief in order to give a sharp focus. I am not seeking to produce a description and analysis of the teachers' understandings of the nature of religious belief in general; rather how they deal with the question of the 'truth' of those beliefs in the particular context of collective worship. Some recent studies in areas as diverse as theology, philosophy, education and sociology have emphasised the importance of a consideration of the question of 'truth' in a plural world (e.g. O'Leary 1996; Vroom 1989; McGrath 1996; Wright 1993).

THE SOCIOLOGICAL CONTEXT

There have been several sociological studies in recent years which have sought to describe and analyse the nature and status of religious belief in contemporary Britain. We need at the outset to take notice of the warning of Davie (1994, 6) who says:

> There is a substantial amount of information (some of it excellent) about small pieces of the religious jigsaw in this country . . . . In contrast, the picture in the middle remains alarmingly blurred. We discover that there is really very little information indeed about the beliefs of ordinary British people and the significance of these beliefs in everyday life.

She also warns that, given the "complexities of contemporary society", the classic sociological explanations of religion are faltering and new frames of reference need to be found. (p.190; cf. Clarke and Byrne 1993, 204-206). Despite these caveats there are some important features which we should note from these studies. It is not possible in the space available to give an overall account of the surveys and the various interpretations

which have been put upon the data. I shall only attempt to draw attention to three key findings of these studies which have significant implications for my research.

"Believing without belonging"

The first feature is what Davie (1994, 5) calls "persistent undercurrents of faith." She summarises the findings of several surveys in the phrase "believing without belonging." She describes the growing mismatch between indices of religious belief in this country which remain relatively high, and the statistics which show a marked decline in religious membership and practice - at least as regards the traditional, institutional churches. The sacred persists, but not necessarily in traditional forms. Religious belief is mutating rather than disappearing. It is more accurate, she says, "to describe late-twentieth century Britain - together with the rest of Europe - as unchurched rather than simply secular" (pp.12-13).

Support for this analysis comes from several sources. The European Values Group (1992, 10) has undertaken two major surveys - one in 1981 and one in 1990. They found that:

> Most Europeans maintain a belief in God and regard themselves as religious but the Christianity they profess is 'diluted' and less orthodox than a decade ago . . . . God remains 'very important' in the personal lives of only one-in-five of the population . . . The process of disengagement from the institutional church continues with the fall in 'core' membership greatest in those countries in which attendance is highest. (p.10)
>
> Four out of five Europeans identify themselves as belonging to a Christian religious denomination, and almost three out of four claim to have been brought up religiously at home. (p.42)
>
> for most Europeans, it is a 'diluted' Christianity that they profess. (p.48)

The British Social Attitudes Survey (9th Report, 1992/3) states that the British are neither devout nor irreligious:

> Seven out of ten adults believe in God, more than half believing in life after death and in heaven; . . . almost two thirds belong to a religious denomination. Moreover, 16 per cent attend services at least two or three times per month, more than one out of

four pray at least once a week and 28 per cent have had an intense 'mystical' experience (Jowell et al 1992, 51-52).

They further report that although confidence in the institutional churches is low, support for daily school prayers remains high with seventy per cent thinking these should definitely or probably occur in state schools.

Kay (1997, 28ff) gives a useful summary of figures relating to belief in God in Britain in the years 1945-1996 and concludes that in this time span "belief in a personal God has declined, athiesm has increased and a generalised theism has remained constant." Despite this widespread religiosity, links with official, institutional religion are now the pursuit of a small minority and show a substantial decline during this century. A census of English churchgoing by Brierley (1991) revealed that on Sunday 15th October 1989, only ten per cent of adults and fourteen per cent of children attended a church.

This pattern of "believing without belonging" points to the problematic nature of the 'secularisation thesis' which has been such a crucial concept in the sociology of religion. Wilson (1966, 11) drew attention to the substantial evidence for the thesis that "religion - seen as a way of thinking, as the performance of particular practices, and as the institutionalization and organization of these patterns of thought and action - has lost influence in both England and the United States in particular, as it has in other western societies." A very wide-ranging debate on secularisation has taken place, but the idea that religious belief would steadily become less and less influential in people's lives has not proved to be the case, although the form of this religiosity has changed substantially.

"New formulations of the sacred" - religious belief as private, individual and relative

The second important feature for us to note from the sociological studies is the characterisation of the nature of religious belief in the 1990s as private, individual and relative. Davie (1994, 39) suggests that the "new formulations of the sacred" which have appeared in the 1990s include the features of religious consumerism, individual choice and eclecticism:

> We then shop around for our spiritual needs. Religious organizations (conventional and otherwise) respond to such requests by 'marketing' particular products, of an enormously varied nature . . . (p.39)

Bruce (1995, 64) argues that religion can now be characterised as 'private' and 'voluntary'. Church-going and traditional religious belief are no longer pre-requisites of public life. Part of the reason for this can be found in the rise of multi-cultural Britain. Immigration in the 1960s meant that people of faiths other than Christianity were now living in Britain in far larger numbers than ever before. This, combined with increasing secularisation in public life, has led to a marked division in modern societies between the 'public' and 'private' realms. The public sphere is rational, instrumental and widely agreed; the private sphere is expressive, affective and a matter of individual choice or preference. Religion, he argues, is largely confined to the private sphere (pp.90-93). Religious beliefs are no longer part of the 'taken for granted' world: they are now "obviously a matter of choice" (pp.130-131). McLeod (1995, 4) defines the "privatization of religion in modern England" as meaning that

> religious language, religiously-based assumptions about the nature of the world and religiously-legitimated moral principles have become the preserve of committed minorities, rather than being part of the taken-for-granted assumptions of the majority of the population.

McLeod likens this situation to the loss of a common language. In a similar vein, Sacks (1995, vii) has said, "With the transition of Britain from a strong common culture to a more fragmented, segmented and pluralised one, we suddenly find that we are all members of a minority group."

This trend towards the individualisation and privatisation of religious belief is well illustrated by the rise of 'new religions' and the 'new age', especially since the 1960s. Bruce (1995, 95) comments that "the once dominant culture has become so weakened that people feel free to search the global supermarket of cultures for new ideas and new perspectives." The new religions tend to have an individualistic, this-worldly, instrumental emphasis (p.102). They also have an eclectic character: we are in "a milieu

in which people acquire and absorb a variety of beliefs and practices that they combine into their own pockets of culture and attend to with differing degrees of seriousness" (p.105). Bruce describes the new age as "the zenith of individualism" (p.122) and argues that:

> It has now shifted up in abstraction from a behavioural and ethical principal to an epistemological claim. It is now asserted as the right to decide what is and is not true. . . . The inevitable consequence is relativism, not just in matters of behaviour . . . but now in the realms of knowledge.

He concludes that individualism - "the right to make choices" and "the right to define reality" - is the key feature in understanding the place of religion in modern society. In particular this has led to epistemological relativism:

> The religious deviants of previous ages, though they parted from the consensus in specific claims, none the less contended for what they believed to be the truth. Our New Age seekers deny the possibility of any authority beyond the preferences of the individual. (p.135)

This picture, as described by Bruce, is widely supported. Skeie (1995, 86ff) comments that:

> Many sociologists of religion describe the position of religion in the west in terms of increasing individualisation and privatisation. . . .
> . . . Modern plurality is encouraging a religious plurality at the same time as it is relativising the question of truth through all the faith-options. Perhaps Peter Berger is the sociologist who has expressed this view most clearly, using the metaphor of the commodity market to describe the relations between religious communities.

These comments are endorsed by the findings of the European Values Study 1981-1990. It states that secularisation is still a strong trend with the place of institutional religion declining in people's lives. Confidence in all institutions, including the churches, is also waning. Individualism - the freedom to choose in every area of life - is highly valued, as is autonomy - the freedom of people to "act according to their own (divergent) norms" (European Values Group 1992, 6). As far as religious and other world-views are concerned the picture is one of fragmentation, individualisation and relativism. The survey says that

> for any particular individual, a highly integrated world view may exist, but its components may be quite dissimilar from those of any other person's world view.

> Individualism may result in a preoccupation with oneself and a highly relativistic outlook. . . . (p.5)
>
> . . . No overarching European value system exists . . . . (p.7)

The influence of age

This is the third major feature which we must note from the sociological studies. The European Values Survey found that "values are generationally and perhaps also age related, at least to some extent. . . . 64% of the people who are over 50 years of age consider religion to be important in their lives, whereas for people under the age of 35, only 34% consider it to be important". (p.52) Very significantly, "only one in seven parents aged under 35 years believes that it is important to develop religious faith in children." (p.9) Their findings suggest that "younger generations are significantly less likely than older generations to have had a religious upbringing or to regard religion as important in life." (p. 44)

In a questionnaire survey of over thirteen thousand young people aged between thirteen and fifteen Francis and Kay (1995, 136) found that "nearly two out of five (39%) are theists and a similar number (35%) are agnostics. Atheists amount to a quarter (26%)." They also reported that "the view that Christianity is the only true religion is held by only 16% of teenagers and rejected by 42%. The remaining 42% are uncertain about this." (p.137). The figures for Sunday School attendance are also highly significant. In the 1930s approximately two-thirds of all children attended, by the 1950s this was down to about one half. Now only about 15% of children attend church. (General Synod Board of Education and Board of Mission 1991, 4).

These findings from sociological studies suggest that very substantial changes are taking place in the understanding of religious belief and the part such belief plays in people's lives. Although we need to be cautious about the description of previous eras, there has been a shift from a more homogeneous society in which Christianity played a more central role to a more heterogeneous one in which Christianity exists alongside other major faiths

and world-views as well as 'New Age' beliefs. I shall, in later chapters, be drawing comparisons between the trends described above and my findings concerning the way religious belief is regarded in the context of collective worship.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

The shift from Modernity to Postmodernity

Modernity is an extremely complex social, economic, political and philosophical phenomenon which had its origins in the Enlightenment and has dominated western culture ever since, although there are significant indications that we are now at a moment of substantial cultural transition to what has been called 'postmodernity'. We need to note some of the key themes of modernity because they have substantially shaped our present understandings of truth, knowledge, religious belief and education - all of which are central to this study. Usher and Edwards (1994, 2) have suggested that:

> Educational theory and practice is founded on the discourse of modernity . . . . Historically, education can be seen as the vehicle by which modernity's 'grand narratives', the Enlightenment ideals of critical reason, individual freedom, progress and benevolent change, are substantiated and realised.

The crucial themes of modernity which are relevant to this study include the Cartesian emphasis on the individual as the knowing subject, the empiricism which sought knowledge via the senses and human experience rather than via divine revelation, the confidence in an over-arching, universal reason which was context-and-culture-neutral, the enormous influence of science which became the effective paradigm of true, objective knowledge built on empirical 'facts' and the use of inductive and analytic reason, the assigning of religious belief to the 'private' domain and the rights and freedom of the individual to make their own choices in such matters. There have been several important critiques of what has been termed 'the Enlightenment Project' - notably from Polanyi (1958) who questioned the concept of detached, objective knowledge, and from MacIntyre (especially 1985a & 1988) who emphasised the socially-embodied character of traditions of rationality. These will be considered in more detail later.

Many scholars have attempted to describe and analyse the shift from modernity to postmodernity (e.g. Connor 1989; Middleton and Walsh 1995; Anderson ed. 1996; Osborn 1995). This transition has affected virtually all areas of life and it includes both sociological and philosophical aspects. For the purposes of this study there are several important themes of which we must take note. These include a suspicion of 'metanarratives' i.e. grand over-arching explanatory systems of thought or belief; the constructed nature of world-views; the relativisation of truth, often seeing claims to the 'Truth' as a covert exercise of unwarranted power; an emphasis on the plurality of voices and views or 'multiple language games' or 'systems of meaning'; that we live in a 'centreless universe' with no safely detached observation posts from which human life and thought can be evaluated in any absolute manner; that we have moved away from the Enlightenment confidence in human 'Reason' towards a realisation that there are many different types of rationality, not necessarily all commensurable; and that each individual is free to choose and construct their own world-view and version of reality.

I shall argue later that the teachers' understanding of religious belief is largely dominated by a modernist, liberal view, but there is also evidence of some more distinctively postmodern approaches as well.

The question of 'truth'

Of particular importance in this study is the question of the 'truth' of religious or other world-views and how the concept of 'truth' can be applied and analysed. There is a vast philosphical literature on this topic and all that can be done here is to produce a sketch of the main issues which are pertinent to this study.

There are several classical philosphical theories about the nature of truth (see Schmitt 1995, Kirkham 1995, White 1970). Of these theories, three have been particularly enduring and widely discussed: these are the correspondence, the coherence, and the pragmatic theories.

Correspondence theories argue that true statements describe 'the way the world really is', and that there is a 'correspondence' between what is said and a presumed objective reality which exists independently of the human mind (even if it is perceived through a particular cultural-linguistic lens). This raises questions concerning how we really 'know' about this presumed external reality and the exact nature of the relationship of 'correspondence' between it and our statements and mental pictures of 'reality'.

Coherence theories avoid these problems by making logical coherence rather than correspondence with 'reality' the main criterion and meaning of truth. The really important thing is that the whole system of beliefs hangs together in a logically coherent manner. As Schmitt (1995, 103) puts it, "A true proposition is one that belongs to some designated coherent set of propositions." Such an approach to truth has considerable attractions in a plural world of apparently competing world-views such as faces the teachers who lead collective worship in multi-faith schools. It can allow different coherent systems, which seem to contradict each other, all to be true because the criterion of truth is internal consistency within a given system. One significant problem then, is how to make choices between different systems.

Pragmatic Theories focus on facts, action and experience, arguing that the concept of truth is essentially defined by the usefulness of a belief. James (1908) argues that "if theological ideas prove to have a value for concrete life, they will be true" (p.73) and "an idea is 'true' so long as to believe it is profitable in our lives" (p.75). Later on he declares that, "On pragmatic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true." (p.299). These quotations do not do justice to the complexity of James' views on truth as in other areas he tends also to make use of ideas from the correspondence and coherence theories of truth, but they do illustrate how his thinking stressed the importance of, as he says, "the truth's cash value in experiential terms" (p. 200).

Schmitt (1995, 79) points out that there are two kinds of usefulness which a belief might have, "A belief is behaviourally useful when it empowers us to satisfy our desires. . . . A belief is cognitively useful when it equips us to organise, predict and explain our experience." He also points out that, in the end, pragmatic theories are usually formulated in a relativistic manner since whether it is useful to believe a proposition varies from one believer to another. This makes it attractive to the teacher faced with a diversity of views in a school assembly and wanting to say they are all valid and true.

Three important underlying philosophical issues

To investigate the nature and status of religious belief, we need not only to look at the question of 'truth', but also at some of the underlying philosophical issues, of which three are of particular relevance to this study.

Realism and Idealism

Realists argue that the world exists independently of human thought whereas idealists insist on the mind-dependence of reality. Most realists recognise that we do not simply see the world directly, but only via our perceptions, concepts and ideas. Kant (1929, 266ff) drew the important distinction between 'things in themselves' (noumena) and 'things as we perceive them' (phenomena). Soskice (1992) argues for what she calls 'Perspectivalism', which holds that the idea of truth does have meaning even if we approach it from different perspectives and may, as a result, have very different understandings. The 'world that is' informs our theories, but our understandings of it are always human concepts and constructs.

Relativism and Absolutism

Relativism is an extremely complex and nuanced concept which has been much debated in philosophy (e.g. Schmitt 1995, chapter 2), sociology (e.g. Berger and Luckmann 1966) and theology (e.g. Runzo 1986). In general, relativism argues that knowledge and truth are always relative to a particular person, community, culture, system of beliefs, cognitive

framework, intellectual perspective or conceptual scheme whereas absolutists hold that the concept of truth cannot be completely relativised. In a seminal article MacIntyre (1985b) argued that relativism has established that there is no neutral point from which to assess competing truth claims. Each set of beliefs has its own way of seeing the world. In particular, the criteria for assessing truth claims and of rationality were embedded within each system. As a result the predicate 'true' is reduced to 'true for me/us/this community'. He goes on to argue that this does not necessarily mean that we are all imprisoned within our own particular standpoint unable to converse with others of a different view. He points to the fact that languages develop and may reach a point where there are contradictions within the system which cannot be resolved within that conceptual framework, but only in the light of another. He suggests that this shows we can and must be open to new forms of rationality other than our own and are not therefore confined to a total relativism. MacIntyre's critique of relativism (and also of modernity, see MacIntyre 1985a & 1988) is highly relevant to acts of collective worship in which several different religious traditions are present and where a way needs to be found of relating them to one another in a manner which does justice both to their self-understandings and the educational context.

Knowledge and belief

The discussion about knowledge and belief investigates how claims to 'knowledge' can be justified. Is there a qualitative difference between a claim to know something and a claim to believe something? Central to this debate is the issue of truth claims. (See Phillips Griffiths ed. 1967; Woozley 1949, chapters 6-8). The influence of science and the empiricist tradition in philosophy have tended to act as a paradigm for 'objective knowledge'. Locke (1960, 320ff) drew the distinction between knowledge and belief: the former was certain and could be established via experience and the use of reason, but was limited in extent; the latter was broader in scope, but much less well established - its rationality depending on its degree of probability. This distinction was taken to its most extreme form by the Logical Positivists who, much influenced by the traditions of

philosophical empiricism and mathematical logic, argued that only analytic or empirically verifiable propositions could stake any claim to knowledge. All other areas of discourse (e.g. morality, aesthetics, religion) could make no such claims. Metaphysical claims where no reference to sense experience is possible are neither true nor false, but literally 'senseless' (See Ayer 1936). Such language might have emotive or imperative significance, but it could not be considered as making meaningful, factual claims about an objective world. This view is now widely questioned with a much greater awareness of the cultural dependency of so-called 'scientific' thinking itself and with the breakdown of the liberal enlightenment view which saw human reason as the detached, objective and agreed means by which all claims to knowledge could be tested (e.g. Polanyi 1958, MacIntyre 1988).

The distinction between knowledge and belief appeared important to many of the teachers in my sample who made a clear demarcation between what they considered as matters of 'fact' (scientific or historical) and matters of 'opinion' (religious beliefs, personal and moral values). This had a substantial influence on their approach to collective worship as we shall see later.

THE THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

There are many, radically different understandings of the nature of religious belief (see Clarke and Byrne 1993) and, in particular, of its 'truth'. These have been developed, in part, to deal with some of the philosophical problems outlined above. This section attempts to illustrate the range of these understandings with a view to identifying some of the approaches which may be present in the current practice of collective worship - either wittingly or unwittingly. It may also be possible that genuinely new understandings are being created in this particular context of collective worship. The teacher facing a multi-faith assembly cannot avoid the question of how we deal with competing truth claims. As Vroom (1989, 13) says:

> Religions claim that they know man and the world as these really are, yet they differ in their views of reality. Questions therefore arise as to how the claims to truth by

> the various religions are related. Are they complementary? Do they contradict or overlap one another? These questions couch a yet more fundamental question: what, according to the religious traditions themselves, is the nature of religious knowledge? How ought we to conceive of claims to truth by religions?

The sheer variety and complexity of views on the nature of religious belief means I can only introduce some of the main approaches which are relevant to the context of collective worship. To do this I shall use as a basis Byrne's typology of religious belief (1995). This will be modified to fit my context, and I shall add insights from other related typologies (mainly Lindbeck 1984) as well as typologies of religious pluralism (e.g. D'Costa 1986, Race 1993). I have chosen Byrne's typology as my basis because it has been specifically developed to deal with issues of religious pluralism and the fact of diversity and the conflicting cognitive claims of different faiths, all of which are not far from the surface in an act of collective worship. As Byrne comments, "judgement as to the character and meaning of these alleged conflicts has very important bearings on what interpretation and explanation we give to religion as a whole." (p.1). Byrne's typology covers what he describes as a range of responses to the problem of diversity (which is one of the main problems facing the teacher in collective worship). These responses he calls "naturalism, confessionalism (divided into exclusivist and inclusivist variants), pluralism, relativism and varieties of neutralism" (p.2).

Naturalism is "dismissive of the possibility of finding any genuine cognitive achievement in religion" (p.2). Religion's alleged cognitive character should be reinterpreted, for example as an expression of emotion rather than as having a genuine referential function. Hick (1989, 1) calls such interpretations of religious belief "naturalistic, or reductionist." Such views suggest that religious belief is a delusion, false, or at least presented in a very misleading way if it purports to be describing the way the world really is. To gain a true understanding of religious belief we must look at its function in the lives of the believers. Leading proponents of such accounts of religious belief include Feuerbach, Freud and Durkheim. They, respectively, interpret religious belief as projection onto the universe of:

ideal human qualities; buried infancy memories of one's father; and the social reality of the community with its absolute claims and supporting presence.

Braithwaite (1971), in an article entitled, 'An Empiricist's view of the nature of religious belief' gives an example of such a 'naturalist' understanding of religious belief. He takes an adaptation of the Logical Positivists' 'Verification Principle', and argues that the meaning of religious and moral statements is to be found in their use - a conative theory of the nature of religious belief. He concludes that religious assertions are essentially an intention to behave in a certain way and the association of this intention with a particular set of religious stories whose function is to reinforce that intention - i.e. religious stories have first and foremost a psychological function.

Confessionalism, in contrast, "finds cognitive success in religion, but locates it solely or primarily in one confession" (Byrne 1995, 3). Its exclusive variant holds all the cognitive merit to be in one religion to the exclusion of all others; its inclusive variant allows other faiths cognitive success in the degree to which they "at some level approach the success of the favoured faith" (p.3).

In allowing religious beliefs "cognitive success" confessionalism is a 'realist' account of faith which sees the question of 'truth' as central and usually presupposes some form of correspondence theory of truth. This relates to one of Lindbeck's three theories of doctrine - the 'propositional-cognitive' - which sees doctrines as informative, cognitive propositions or truth claims about objective realities (Lindbeck 1984, 16 & 24). Many religious believers see their beliefs as giving some account of 'the way the world really is'. For example, Pailin (1986, 4) says:

> Faith is an assent to what is held to be fundamentally the case, it involves questions about what is true. It is a serious distortion of the character of faith to consider it can be content to see itself as merely the expression of arbitrary tastes, upbringing, prejudice or blind choice.

Several reports of the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England (1976, 1981, 1987, 1995) have all emphasised the importance of the pursuit of truth. The 1976 report (p.34) said "the crucial point about the creeds is still, as it was always meant to be, the question of truth." The 1981 report (p.17) argues that doctrines can point towards a transcendent truth. It speaks of "the conviction that this transcendent truth not only exists, but is also to some extent grasped by these inadequate statements" [i.e. of corporate beliefs]. The 1987 report (p.28) acknowledged that theological models are not literal descriptions, but nevertheless, "they are tools to enable us to think and imagine, and so to advance in our approach to truth."

McGrath (1996) in a book entitled, 'A Passion for Truth', argues from an evangelical standpoint that postmodern aversion to questions of truth is flawed and that theology must be concerned about telling the 'truth' about God. He rejects post-liberalism which, in affirming the distinctiveness of different religious traditions seems simultaneously to reduce them to "a purely intratextual affair with little concern to its possible relations to an external objective reality" (p.135). In doing this truth claims become little more than matters of internal consistency. He also argues against the postmodern rejection of metanarratives and against what he calls a "prescriptive pluralism in which normative claims to truth are to be censured as imperialist and divisive" (p.206). McGrath suggests that, "Evangelicalism's passion for the truth of the Gospel cannot be accommodated within this context" (p.17).

Hebblethwaite (1988), in a defence of objective theism, describes the influence of Kantian scepticism concerning the knowledge of the objective world and how this leads to the 'death of God' school of thought and the Nietzschean view that man's world and values are his own creation. He also analyses the effect of the plurality of today's world in generating relativist and non-cognitive understandings of religious belief. In Hebblethwaite's view belief in an objective God is central to Christianity and the "question of truth" is the most basic and important of all. He concludes:

> The heart of the faith is Christian discernment of the reality of God . . . . There is an ocean of truth here, in objective theism, to be discovered by all who embark upon the ship of faith and are prepared to use all their faculties, including reason, to chart its course. (p.145)

Pluralism is the next of Byrne's classifications. This allows "cognitive success to a great many of the world's religious traditions" and asserts that each provides "folk with real contact with a single transcendent focus" (Byrne 1995, 5). There is "a basic cognitive equality between faiths in putting human beings in contact with this reality and enabling them to be vehicles of salvation" (p.6). A prime example of this is the theology of John Hick (1989). He interprets religion as "our varied human responses to a transcendent reality or realities" (p.1). He contrasts 'naturalistic' interpretations of religion (whether sociological, psychological or phenomenological) which describe religion as a purely human activity or state of mind, with 'religious' interpretations which are centred "upon an awareness of and response to a reality that transcends ourselves and our world" (p.3). He comments about the latter that "such definitions presuppose the reality of the intentional object of religious thought and experience" (p.3). He highlights the importance of the issue of realism when he says, "in a growing contemporary debate it has become a vital religious question whether religion requires or can, on the contrary, dispense with belief in a transcendent reality" (p.6). He is very aware that "we always perceive the transcendent through the lens of a particular religious culture" (p.8). He puts forward the pluralistic hypothesis that "the great world traditions constitute different conceptions and perceptions of, and responses to, the Real from within the different cultural ways of being human" (p.376). He makes a bold attempt to deal with issues of conflicting truth-claims which inevitably arise if all the major religions are supposed to be describing the same transcendent reality. He builds on the Kantian distinction between the 'noumenal' and the 'phenomenal' and says that we can only talk of the 'Real in itself' mythologically and not literally. He seems to vere towards a pragmatic approach to truth when he says that:

> A statement or set of statements is mythologically true if it is not literally true, but nevertheless tends to invoke an appropriate dispositional attitude to X. Thus mythological truth is practical . . . . For the conformity of the myth to Reality does

> not consist in a literal conformity of what is said to the facts, but in the appropriateness to the myth's referent of the behavioural dispositions that it tends to invoke in the hearer. (p.348)

He says later "the truth or validity or authenticity of such manifestations lies in their soteriological effectiveness" (p.373).

Relativism is the next of Byrne's categories. He says:

> The key feature of relativism is the granting of cognitive success to all religions by dint of making them conceptual schemas . . . which each create or constitute their own worlds. The relativist says that truth and reality are relative to the manifold conceptual schemas into which human cognition divides. Relativism thereby has a pluriform account of the nature of reality. (Byrne 1995, 7)

Hick's view is to some extent a relativist one except that he allows for a concept of the 'Real-in-itself' which is beyond all the various approaches to it. Many of the teachers in my sample took the attitude that the different religious beliefs were simply different ways of seeing the world, different conceptions of reality, each with their own validity. This corresponds with Byrne's comment that

> relativism depends on a form of idealism. There is no one true account of the object of cognition because that object is not independent of us as knowing subjects. The mind must make, in some substantial way, the reality it knows. (Byrne 1995, 7)

This view also has affinities with Lindbeck's "cultural-linguistic" theory of doctrine which sees doctrines as "communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude and action . . . comprehensive interpretive schemes, usually embodied in myths or narratives and heavily ritualised . . . ." (Lindbeck 1984, 32). Doctrines shape the way we see and experience the world.

Relativism would also resonate with the views of Berger and Kellner (1981, 63) who regard religious beliefs as different worlds of meaning - neither true nor false. They emphasise "the *constructed* character of what human beings mean by 'reality'", and suggest that, "Different people find different definitions of reality plausible" and so operate within different 'plausibility structures'. (p.63) They later raise the question,

"Can one still ask about religious truth once one has recognised that religious systems too are social constructions?" (p.86).

Neutralism is the last and most sceptical of the views of religious belief described by Byrne (1995, 8). It "refuses to say which religions correspond to reality and which not." It affirms "that we do not have the grounds for awarding even the most minimal cognitive success to the traditions." It is simply not possible to make "global judgements and comparisons as to truth and reality in this area." The theological non-realism of Cupitt (esp. 1984) falls into this category. He says

> religious beliefs should be understood not in the realist way, but rather as being more like moral convictions. They are not universal truths, but community-truths, and they guide lives rather than describe facts. They belong together in systems, and each system belongs to just one community. They express what it means to belong to that community, to share its way of life and to owe allegiance to its values. . . .
> . . . Our beliefs are rules of life dressed up in pictures, giving symbolic expression to our commitment to a particular community, its values, its sense of the shape and direction a human life should have - in a word, its spirituality.
> There are in the human world many complete and coherent spiritualities or ways of life. Their values may overlap, but as wholes they are distinct; and there can be no Archimedian point independent of them all from which they may be evaluated. For as soon as you begin to evaluate them, you have joined one of them.
> Thus our most fundamental beliefs have simply to be chosen. Their 'truth' is not descriptive or factual truth, but the truth about the way they work out in our lives. They are to be acted upon. (Cupitt 1984, 19)

In opting for this non-realist, voluntarist and anthropocentric interpretation of religion which sees all meaning, value and truth as man-made, and God as "the sum of our values" rather than as "an objectively existing superperson" (pp.269-70), Cupitt has avoided the problem of conflicting truth claims, but leaves us no criteria by which to make any religious choices. He seems to be adopting an approach to truth which combines the coherence and pragmatic theories.

Byrne adds two more 'isms' to his list both of which occurred in the teachers' understandings. Firstly, essentialism sees religions as "expressions of an underlying common core" (1995, 9). This is related to the "Experiential-Expressive" theory of doctrine described by Lindbeck (1984). This sees doctrines as non-informative,

non-discursive symbols of inner feelings or attitudes. He says, "Different religions are diverse expressions or objectifications of a common core experience." (p.31). Lindbeck traces such views back to Schleiermacher who adopted a primarily 'psychological' approach - religion is essentially a matter of feeling (of absolute dependence) rather than intellectual assent to a set of propositions.

The second of Byrne's additional categorisations is Syncretism which is "the attempt to harmonise religious diversity by taking elements from each religion in order to create a common form of religion acceptable to all (Byrne 1995, 10). In many respects, acts of collective worship were precisely of this character.

Byrne's typology is produced to help with the problems raised by the diversity and differences between religions. Many others (e.g. Wiles 1992; D'Costa 1986; Newbigin 1989) have written on the problems of religious pluralism. Race (1993) identifies three main approaches: 'Exclusivism' which sees one faith as absolute and final; 'Inclusivism' which sees one faith as supreme, but allows there can be truth in other faiths in so far as they agree with the supreme faith; and 'Pluralism' which sees the different faiths as equally valid approaches to the one Ultimate Reality. Race adopts a pluralist position. D'Costa (1986) agrees that these are the three main paradigms, at least in Christian theology in the twentieth century, but adopts an inclusivist stance.

This brief survey of interpretations of the nature of religious belief makes no pretence to be exhaustive. Rather its purpose is to illustrate the fact that many and very different interpretations are possible. The issue in this study is to examine whether or not there are any particular understandings which underlie, or are reflected by, the current practice of collective worship in schools - either by design or in practice: these understandings may or may not reflect some of those outlined above. This will be further discussed when we come to the findings of the research (chapters 4-7), and in the conclusion (chapter 8).

THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The final aspect of the general context of this study which needs to be considered in this introductory chapter is the educational one. This section gives a brief account of some of the different philosophies of education (with particular reference to the concept of 'truth') which are relevant to the study - namely the traditional, liberal and postmodern views. Issues relating to the more particular context of collective worship (including the questions of spiritual, moral and religious education) will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter.

Holmes (1992, 20-21) gives a typology of six educational philosophies which, he claims, "appear to capture the dominant belief systems in education within contemporary western society." These are labelled as 'progressive' - with the child at the centre; 'technocratic' - aiming at success in future life; 'cultural' - seeking to cultivate intellectual and cultural development; 'traditional' - developing character and personal responsibility within a clear moral framework; 'individualist' - focusing on encouraging individual freedom and personal development; and 'egalitarian' - working towards a better society. Arguably, all these elements were present in my sample schools. What such a typology does point to is that there are very different conceptions of the aim and content of education, and this has important consequences for the place of collective worship because each philosophy will take a different view. In a recent lecture Tate (1998) has emphasised the way in which a theory of education always builds on a broader vision and understanding of life.

The most helpful division of views of education for this study is a threefold one of traditional, liberal and post-liberal. The reason for this is that the teachers in my sample seemed to be operating mostly within the liberal understanding of education, but the voices of those from the other two viewpoints are clamouring to be heard. For example, Sacks (1997, 1ff) argues that for British society in general "for the past fifty years the libertarian view has prevailed," but "it has been tried and it has failed" and therefore, "we must search for a new way."

Traditional views of education

Traditional philosophies of education assume an objective reality or truth. This can take religious (e.g. Christian, Muslim or Jewish understandings) or non-religious (e.g. knowledge or moral values as 'objective') forms. It is the task of education to make the learner aware of that truth so that they understand the world 'as it really is'.

Traditional religious understandings of education

In its Old Testament and Jewish form this philosophy is based on the understanding that God has revealed his nature and purpose through the history of Israel and in particular the Law of Moses. Education is not just about learning in an academic manner: it is induction into a right way of living and a proper understanding of the nature of life (i.e. as under God). It often has a communal rather than individual emphasis.

This traditional view is expressed from a Jewish viewpoint by Sacks (1997, 173ff) who spoke of himself in his own education as "being inducted into an identity and a series of moral commitments. I was becoming part of a people, its shared experiences and hopes." In order to learn "we need to see how master-practitioners practise their craft" (p.176). He sums this up by saying that "education is the transmission of a tradition." He likens it to the inheritance of a magnificent building of which we are but the temporary guardians. It will be adapted to each new generation, but retains its integrity down the ages.

This traditional view is repeated in the Muslim understanding of education. Sarwar (1994, i) says:

> In Islam, education is viewed as a process through which a child is prepared for this life and the afterlife so that the child can face life situations with an awareness of responsibility and accountability. Islam requires all human endeavours to conform to Qur'anic Guidance which is immutable, infallible and valid for all times and climes.

The recommendations from the 'First World Conference on Muslim Education' in 1977 state that, "The ultimate aim of Muslim education lies in the realization of complete

submission to Allah on the level of the individual, the community and humanity at large" (quoted in Muslim Educational Quarterly, 1995, Vol. 12.2).

Catholic education similarly sees no division between education and faith. Arthur (1995) argues that "Catholic schools are essentially an expression of the Church's salvific mission" (p.46) with the primary aims being "grounded in revealed truths about our nature, our origin and our destiny" (p.48), and "the chief goal of Catholic education is to develop a consciousness of God as a reality in human experience and a sense of personal relationship with Him" (p.52). The Congregation for Catholic Education has described the role of the Catholic school as follows:

> Its task is fundamentally a synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life: the first is reached by integrating all the different aspects of human knowledge through the subjects taught, in the light of the gospel; the second in the growth of the virtues characteristic of the Christian. (quoted in Catholic Education Service 1995, 10)

Whereas Catholic schools have tended to cater almost exclusively for the children of Catholic families, the Anglican schools, partly for historical reasons, have had to act as both 'neighbourhood' schools and as church schools. As a result their approach is more nuanced. John Hall, the General Secretary of the National Society and the Church of England Board of Education has put it thus:

> Fundamentally, all Church schools should provide a high quality education based on Christian values, enabling pupils to achieve their full God-given potential as human beings for the benefit of God's world. In addition, Church schools should nurture the children of Christian families in the faith of their homes so that it might become for them a living personal faith. And they should offer children of other faiths and none such a positive experience of Christ and his Body the Church that the faith of the Christian community might be respected and understood by them. By God's good grace children with no faith background might also find the seeds planted in them growing into a personal living faith. (Carey, Hope and Hall 1998, 44)

This has been quoted at length because it shows the delicate balance held by Anglican schools between on the one hand, open, critical education and on the other hand, nurture. It also indicates how the school is based on basic Christian beliefs about human nature and purpose.

Non-religious traditional understandings of education

Greek and Roman philosophies of education tended to emphasise discovery of truth by the human mind rather than through divine revelation. Plato's theory of education is based on the 'Form of the Good' - an objective, transcendent base of values and ultimate reality. To be educated is to assist people to 'see' this objective truth. (See Bowen 1972, 107 - 110). Some modern writers argue on the basis of such a traditional view. Mitchell (1997) suggests that education based on 'transcendent values', agreed across many religions, is tenable. A similar view was expressed by Lewis (1943). Tate (1998) stresses the importance of identifying the "shared values" of a society and promoting these in schools. In some respects the important views of Hirst (1974) can be classified as traditional in the sense that he held a strong concept of objective knowledge. However, it is more helpful to consider his views in the next section on liberal education.

Liberal views of education

With the Enlightenment came the shift in many areas of western culture towards a liberal philosphy of education. Previously education in the West had been dominated by the Church, and especially the doctrine of divine revelation with the Bible as the source of authoritative knowledge, and the doctrine of original sin which emphasised the flawed nature of human nature and reasoning. The Enlightenment and the rise of modern science stressed empirical observation and human reason as the route to knowledge. Increasingly, western, liberal education was based on the use of reason and experience rather than on convention and tradition. The aim was to produce independent, free-thinking, rational human beings, who could then make informed and reasonable decisions about matters of human life. As Sacks (1997, 175) summarises, "According to this view the child is a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate, on which it can write any script it chooses. It learns words, language, ideals by itself."

The ideal of liberal education was very strong in the 1960s and 1970s and is still extremely influential in schools today. It is based on several foundations: that objective

knowledge can be found via empirical scientific method and the use of a universal human reason; the freedom of the individual to make their own choices about life; a neutrality about competing visions of the 'good life'; and the location of moral order in the concepts of human rights and society.

When it comes to religious education, the liberal view regards religious knowledge as suspect and not in the same category as mathematical, scientific and historical knowledge. In particular, Hirst (1974, chapter 12) argued that we can only teach about religion because there are no publicly agreed standards or tests for religious knowledge. Matters of religious commitment are a private matter for personal choice and are outside the remit of liberal education, which sees young people as autonomous decision makers using empirical observation and human reason to guide them (Sealey 1985).

A crucial aspect of liberal education for this study is the way it consigns religious belief to the 'private' domain. As Halstead and Taylor (1996, 21) put it:

> Typically, no one conception of the good life is favoured in liberalism, and a vast range of life-styles, commitments, priorities, occuptational roles and life-plans form a marketplace of ideas within the liberal framework . . . . Liberalism makes an important distinction between the private and public domains . . . . Thus, for example, religion is seen as a private and voluntary matter for the individual.

Sacks (1997, 184) neatly illustrates the difference between a traditional and a liberal view of education. As described above, he sees the former as akin to the inheritance of "an ancient but still magnificent building": he characterises the latter as "a matter of handing a child an architectural encyclopedia on the one hand, a heap of bricks on the other, and telling it to build its own house."

Post-liberal understandings of education

With the advent of postmodernism and pluralism, this liberal philosophy of education has come under increasing attack from a number of different directions - notably Christian, Muslim, postmodern, conservative and philosophical. These will be described later,

mostly in chapters two and eight, but it is important to take note at this stage that these critiques are both powerful and increasing in number. Another important consequence is the realisation that many of the issues and dichotomies which arise in the collective worship debate (e.g. education and nurture/indoctrination, the division between knowledge and belief, the public/private values distinction) depend on the liberal paradigm for their currency. They look different when seen from other perspectives. Again, I shall return to this important discussion.

Underlying all this is the question of the pursuit of truth in education and what this might mean. In the liberal understanding education was to give children the tools, especially the use of reason, to engage in the pursuit of objective knowledge as defined by the canons of liberalism in terms of scientific rationalism. The problem is that this marginalised religious beliefs and faith commitments to matters of private choice which could not be decided on rational grounds. The advent of the plural, postmodern world has meant that the liberal prescription of what counts as knowledge and as truth is now under fire. As Middleton and Walsh (1995), in their account of postmodern culture with its emphases on worldviews as human constructs, the plurality of voices, and claims to truth as covert exercises of power, put it, "Truth is stranger than it used to be."

CONCLUSION

The issues described in this chapter give the general background context of this study. They will be returned to in the discussion of the results and in the final conclusions. Having given the above consideration of the broader context, in the next chapter I look at the more specific context of collective worship.

CHAPTER 2

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP - THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CURRENT DEBATE

INTRODUCTION

My intention in this chapter is to give a critical analysis of the literature surrounding collective worship from the particular angle of how the question of the truth of religious belief has been approached in the course of this debate.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prior to the 1944 Education Act

The nineteenth century saw the establishment of a national system of education which was a partnership between the Church (which hitherto had had enormous influence over virtually all education in this country) and the State (whose influence was steadily increasing, especially from the 1870 Education Act onwards). Throughout the nineteenth century both the Church of England (under the umbrella of the National Society founded in 1811) and the Non-Conformists (under the umbrella of the British and Foreign School Society founded in 1807) had been active in establishing their own schools and there was considerable rivalry between them (Chadwick 1997, 3-7). In addition, the Roman Catholic Church was seeking to establish its own schools (see Arthur 1995, chapter 2; Chadwick 1997, 13-14).

Up until 1870 the State had only been involved in the provision of education in a minor way, but that changed substantially with the passing that year of the Elementary Education Act. This established 'board schools' to fill the gaps between the voluntary church schools. As with the subsequent Education Acts (e.g. 1902, 1944, 1988) the religious education sections were only a small part of the whole, but they generated great controversy. At this time the problems were concerned mainly with inter-denominational rivalry, of which Luton provided some good examples (see Dyer and Dony 1975, 136-9),

and with the propriety of state financial support for religious instruction and church schools. Two main provisions were made to deal with the problems. Firstly, the 'Cowper-Temple clause' stated that "no religious catechism or religious formulary which is distinctive of any particular denomination" should be taught in the board schools. Religious Instruction (R.I.) in schools was to be non-denominational which effectively limited it to the teaching of Bible stories (see Chadwick 1997, 11ff; Murphy 1971, 58ff). This immediately indicated that what was going on in the board schools was of a different nature to what went on in the church schools with regard to religion. The State did not care to arbitrate between the various religious views as to their truth and so required a new form of religious instruction, non-denominational, to be created. This unique format of state school religious education has continued in one form or another ever since. The second provision made by the 1870 Education Act for dealing with the problems raised by R.I. was a 'conscience clause' which gave parents the right to withdraw their children from R.I. if they so wished. The State had a duty to protect the freedom of belief of its citizens. Both of these provisions indicated an awareness of the difficulty of providing for worship and religious education in state schools.

During the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, school 'worship' consisted mainly of daily 'observances' which were catechetical in style - a mixture of R.I. and worship that focused on reciting, for example, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed (Hull 1975, 10). In the aftermath of the First World War a significant shift occurred in the approach to school worship. Hull (1975, 15) says:

> A profound change came over school worship during the early 1920s when the new religious education arose, a force which was to dominate religion in the British school with unprecedented power for forty years, coming to its climax and triumph in the passing of the 1944 Education Act which for the first time made school worship compulsory.

During this forty year period schools were largely seen as Christian communities and the task of assemblies was to affirm Christian values and to nurture faith - an implicit assumption of the 'truth' and validity of the Christian faith. A more confessional

approach was being adopted which was exemplified by the widely used Cambridgeshire Agreed Syllabus of 1924 which stated that:

> All education, rightly conceived, is religious education . . . the crucial question in Religious Education must be, so far as the school is concerned, 'Is the school a Christian community? Does membership of the school give a Christian character?'

Part of the driving force behind this approach was the perceived need for a strong moral and spiritual framework for life after the carnage of the First World War.

The 1944 Education Act

The war-time influence was a significant factor in the shaping of the religious provisions of the 1944 Education Act. Cox (1983, 8) quotes a *Times* leader from the early years of the Second World War:

> The truth is . . . that education with religion omitted is not really education at all . . . It will be of little use to fight, as we are fighting today, for the preservation of Christian principles if Christianity itself is to have no future, or at immense cost to safeguard religion against attack from without if we allow it to be starved by neglect from within . . . (*Times*, 13th February 1941; see also Chadwick 1997, 26-27)

Similar sentiments were frequently expressed in the parliamentary debates preceding the passing of the 1944 Education Act (see Souper and Kay 1983, 8-27). It is interesting to note that the *Times* leader uses the phrase 'Christian principles', possibly indicating that what was really valued was not Christian doctrine and belief, but Christian morality and behaviour - i.e. taking a view of religious belief which stressed the importance of its effects in the believer's life rather than the truth or otherwise of its doctrine - closer to a pragmatic view of truth than a correspondence view.

As with the other Education Acts it needs to be remembered that the education system was undergoing huge changes: in 1944 these included the establishment of primary, secondary and further education stages, and the requirement that local education authorities should "contribute to the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community" via the provision of efficient education (section 7). The religious education provision was only a small, if significant part. It reflected a balance of interests

between Church and State in the system of dual control - a balance which had been steadily shifting in the State's direction since 1870. Section 15 established three categories of voluntary school ('aided', 'controlled', and 'special agreement') with varying degrees of state financial support and church control over their running.

The main elements of the Act with regard to school worship and religious instruction were laid down in section 25 which said that

> the school day in every county school and in every voluntary school shall begin with collective worship on the part of all pupils in attendance,

and that

> religious instruction shall be given in every county school and in every voluntary school.

This was a new stage for educational legislation because, although it only enshrined in law what had been the predominant practice in the vast majority of schools, there had never before been a legal compulsion for school worship or R.I..

In addition to this basic provision, parents retained the right to withdraw their children from R.I. and collective worship (section 25), and teachers not to participate; 'worship' was not defined in the Act, and neither the content nor the form were prescribed other than the requirement that it should be non-denominational (section 27). McCreery (1993, 4) comments on the Act's provision for school worship and R.I. as follows: "Parliament clearly saw it as part of the Christian education of the nation's children."

Although, at the time, some doubted the wisdom of making school worship compulsory there was very strong public and parliamentary support in favour of the legislation. However, there were some hints that this consensus was not as complete as it might have seemed when the Act was passed. During the course of the debates the phrase 'corporate worship' which had been in the White Paper was replaced by 'collective worship' (1944 Education Act, section 25) indicating a recognition that not all those present at school worship would necessarily be of one mind on Christian belief and it had to be recognised

that each individual would make their own response (Souper and Kay 1983, 17). In addition, in section 7 (see above), the word, 'religious', favoured by Archbishop William Temple, was replaced by the vaguer and more general word, 'spiritual' suggesting an acknowledgement that the country was not simply homogeneously Christian. The judgement of hindsight has suggested that the Act had sown the seeds of continuing problems. Ballard (1996, 17) said, "The 1944 Act can be regarded as possibly one of the last great acts of English 'Christendom'." Cox and Cairns (1989, 4) argue that in passing the 1944 Act Parliament was "legislating for a society that had ceased to exist." In view of the developments which were to take place it is difficult to avoid such a conclusion.

In the 1950s and into the 1960s the general approach by schools was to try to implement the provisions of the Act, and to do it well - i.e. a largely confessional view was adopted, although underlying tensions were beginning to appear. Assemblies, for the most part, took the form of 'watered-down' church services, and many teachers seemed to regard their task as preparing children for the worship of the church and nurturing them in the Christian faith, trying to make what they did as relevant as possible to the experience of the children (see Copley 1997, 48ff; Foster 1961, 25ff).

The upheaval of the 1960s

By the 1960s many problems were beginning to emerge which had a profound effect on school worship. It is possible to discern at least five major areas of difficulty.

Firstly, immigration was bringing people of other faiths to Britain in large numbers. In many towns and cities it could no longer be assumed that the children in school were from Christian families, however nominal. There were now competitors to Christianity, and each religion made its own truth claims. The comfortable assumptions of the 1944 Act concerning the Christian character of the country could no longer be made so easily (Hogbin 1967, 21ff; Havens 1969, 31ff). Britain was rapidly becoming a plural, multicultural society.

Secondly, the process of secularisation seemed relentless. There was a continuing, inexorable decline in church attendance including Sunday Schools, although, as we noted in chapter one, the country was not without religious and spiritual beliefs - rather those beliefs were becoming more varied and less connected with the institutional churches. In addition, the voices of those of humanist, secularist, atheist or agnostic persuasion were no longer as muted as they had been in the dark days of the Second World War.

Thirdly, educational questions were being asked about whether or not children were able to understand the religious concepts implicit in an act of collective worship. In particular, the work of Ronald Goldman (1964) on the religious understanding of children at various stages in their development was very influential, although some of his conclusions have been seriously questioned since that time. In addition, Loukes' research (1961, 150) had shown that many teenagers had found their lessons on the Bible to be "childish and irrelevant". It had been taught too often without any application to their lives. He advocated the "problem method" approach which began with a problem or issue which was directly relevant to the teenagers and only then proceeded to the Bible's teaching. The implicit assumption seems to be that the truth of Christian belief and faith is to be found not in dry doctrinal propositions, but in the effects of belief in the life of the believer - i.e. a pragmatic approach to its truth where the central issue is, 'does it work?'

Fourthly, some educationalists (e.g. Ballard 1966, 16ff) suggested that there was a tension between the aims of worship and the aims of education: the former assumes belief and commitment, the latter encourages an open and critical stance which scrutinizes belief. Durham (1970, 132), in reviewing the arguments against school worship, commented:

> School worship presupposes the truth of Christian theological propositions and assumes the validity of the practices of Christian prayer.

Such presuppositions were strongly questioned in the 'open'and liberal society which was fast developing in the 1960s and, in particular, it was doubted that worship could be made compulsory as it is, in essence, a freely given response.

Fifthly, the 'new' and radical theology of the 1960s (which, in fact, only popularized some of the ideas that had been current in academic theological circles for many years), exemplified by Robinson (1963), had shaken the foundations of much traditional Christian belief. What had previously been thought of as Christian truth now no longer seemed so certain and the 'new theology' seemed to focus on a more immanent understanding of God as "ultimate concern" or as "the depth and ground of being." As Cox (1983, 18) comments, this redefinition of religion led to a view of religious education as "helping pupils to discover their deepest concern and to think out their personal and social problems in the light of it."

The end for school worship?

These problems meant that many people thought school worship could no longer survive in the open, plural society which Britain was becoming. The Schools' Council 'Working Paper Number 36' (1971), which had a very substantial effect on the teaching of R.E., spoke of

> the absurdity and dishonesty of expecting pupils from a wide variety of backgrounds to participate in something that the majority of their parents have little time for, and which they cannot yet evaluate objectively, however they react now. (Schools' Council 1971, 97)

Although it advocated the advantages of assembly for "a quiet period in adolescence, the fostering of school spirit, the inculcation of values, the promotion of social awareness, and the civic advantage of having some acquaintance with ritual" (p.98), it was heavily critical of the formality, dullness and confusion of aim of assembly in a "multi-religious" situation, and suggested that school worship "really requires a curriculum development project of its own" (p.100).

The problems were such that, in 1975, Hull could write a book entitled, 'School Worship: an Obituary'. The thesis of the book was summarised on the back page as follows, "Worship in daily assembly is an anachronism, inadequate as worship and ill-related to the needs and concerns of the school and the society in which it is situated." Hull had argued

that worship (which assumes belief) and education (which scrutinizes belief) "can never take place concurrently" (p.59) and that "compulsory school worship is the most objectionable example of compulsion which the school offers its pupils" - encouraging both hypocrisy and the compromising of conscience (p.120). In response to this situation Hull called for a "radical overhaul". Hull's stringent and influential critique summed up what was echoed in many articles throughout the 1960s in Religious Education journals (especially 'Learning for Living') and elsewhere. The provisions of the Act were clearly not working as intended. Something had to be done.

The response to the problems

The Church's approach

One significant response to the rapidly changing situation was 'The Fourth R' - the Durham Report of 1970. This was a major review of Religious Education sponsored by the Church of England's Board of Education and the National Society which recognised, at least in part, many of the above problems facing school worship. The report rejected the view that England was "a post-Christian, religiously neutral society" and argued that it was more accurate to describe England as "a post-ecclesiastical society, evincing varying degrees of Christian commitment and association" (para. 307, p.139). It also recognised the significant difference between school and church worship, with the former being more akin to civic services and the like which "do not presuppose the individual commitment of all those who attend them; they have a symbolic significance, representing society's disposition towards religion" (para. 302, pp.137-8). The report concluded that

> regular opportunities for school worship should continue to be provided for two principal reasons:
> (a) The experience of worship is a necessary part of religious education.
> (b) School worship is expressive of society's positive disposition towards religion and contributes to the preservation within the school community of those spiritual, personal, and moral values which derive from the Christian tradition. (para. 308, p.139)

The issue of the truth of the Christian faith was not dealt with directly, but was never far from the surface. A crude confessional approach was rejected as inappropriate in schools

- that was the task of the churches and other similar religious bodies, but the teacher was to press for "commitment to the religious quest, to that search for meaning, purpose and value which is open to all men" (para. 217, pp.103-4). Part of the task of school worship as part of R.E. according to the Durham Report was the educational one of giving pupils the necessary experience to undertake that quest in an informed manner (para. 117, pp.60-61). Underlying this was the assumption that there is a method of searching which is common to all humanity, but leaves open the question of whether or not people will come to similar conclusions. There was clearly a hope that pupils would come to a real Christian faith - and this hope was there, not only because the Christian faith was seen as part of the heritage of this country and as helpful in preserving its moral ethos, but also because of the belief that the Christian faith is true. Two comments in the report indicated a concern for the question of religious truth:

> The aim of religious education should be to explore the place and significance of religion in human life and so to make a distinctive contribution to each pupil's search for a faith by which to live. (para. 215, p.103)
>
> In the final analysis, the decision as to which particular religion will be studied will depend not only on what religion is prevalent in the culture, but on the extent to which that religion is believed to be true. (para. 213, pp.102-103)

The bias of the report towards the truth of the Christian faith was shown in two revealing ways. Firstly, the possibility of secular or 'shared values' assemblies was rejected on the grounds that such assemblies have "very clear irreligious implications" (para. 306, p.138). If that claim is correct then, *mutatis mutandis*, Christian assemblies will have very clear religious implications. Secondly, the report did not really engage with the plural character of British society and the presence of people of other faiths. The section on the study of other religions (paras. 118-123, pp.61-63) rejected the "essentialist claims that there lies behind all religions an essential truth, to know which is the best and purest religious knowledge one can attain to", and drew attention to "the distinct nature of Christianity among other religions, for the Christian derives his faith from a unique event." Concerning assemblies they only recommended an "ad hoc" pattern for those areas of the country where there was a substantial immigrant population (para. 315, p.141).

[Much of this approach is prefigured in the articles of a special edition of the *Theology* journal in July 1965. (Vol.lxviii)].

The schools' response

The schools' response to the problems (described above) of the 1960s and 1970s suggested that the Durham report had missed the mark, at least in its assessment of the teachers' attitudes and disposition towards religion and the Christian faith in the life of the school. Several articles in professional journals (especially *Learning for Living*, and the *Times Educational Supplement*) in the 1960s and 1970s suggest that during this period there were many calls for a more open approach which recognized that schools were on the frontier in a rapidly changing society which was now much more pluriform in character.

There was a widespread ignoring of the worship requirements of the 1944 Education Act and assemblies were rapidly becoming general reflections on humanitarian concerns with the focus being immanent rather that transcendent. Increasingly the assumption was that an assembly was made up of all faiths and none, with a great variety of belief and commitment represented. Worship was no longer understood in a purely religious sense (with a transcendent referent), but was broadened to mean 'worth-ship' - i.e. celebrating and reflecting upon that which was considered to be of ultimate worth and concern. There was a focus on universal ethical truths and moral education because it was assumed that there was common ground in this area between the multiplicity of beliefs. New song books appeared which contained more general and inclusive songs: the same happened with prayer (see Webster 1995, 31-34).

Jones (1969) argued that the favourable climate to Christian school worship which surrounded the 1944 Education Act was beginning to break down and that more "ambivalent" assemblies were needed which took into account the "multi-belief" character of the school. He characterised such an assembly as "one that is sufficiently open for the

members of a mixed congregation to make a whole range of different responses according to their personal inclinations" (Jones 1969, 97). It should also explore common values and concerns; understand worship as "seeing ultimate worth and responding to it" (p.100); exclude traditional hymn singing and prayers; and allow an open response to what is said.

Hogbin (1967, 21) argued that "basic information and pluralistic openess" were needed to allow a proper exchange of views, but he warned of some of the dangers of a facile pluralism. He said:

> The Pluralist situation has brought about the growth of tolerance but the mutual recognition of the difficulty of truth must not lead us into thinking that one religion is as good as another and that we can teach from an uncommitted position.

However, after giving this warning he then rapidly moved to the need for moral education, seeing this as easier ground for a plural society as there might be much greater agreement between the faiths in this area.

Havens (1969, 31ff) described the early tactics of some London schools in dealing with their new multicultural situation. These included: constructing your own hymnbook, looking for universal ethical truths, using inclusive prayers, encouraging respect for all traditions, learning about each other's faiths, and identifying common themes across all religions.

Hull (1975) argued that school worship should be made a far more open experience which can be seen as "being a threshold for worship" (Hull 1975, 125). He says, "Such assemblies will not seek to secure commitment, nor to profess faith, but to deepen understanding and to facilitate choice" (Hull 1975, 136).

In these approaches we can see a powerful trend away from the assumption of the truth of the Christian faith which had undergirded many traditional assemblies and towards a more neutral and non-committal stance.

The 'phenomenological' approach to R.E., Schools' Council 'Working Paper Number 36' (1971), and the dominance of liberal education

The emphasis on neutrality towards the truth of different beliefs was strongly reinforced in the 'phenomenological approach' to the teaching of R.E. which built upon Smart's six dimensions of religion (ritual, mythological, doctrinal, ethical, social and experiential - Smart 1971, 15ff). This was very influential in the approach to religion in schools from the 1970s onwards. This approach sought to get away from confessional stances and did not seek to promote any one religious viewpoint, but encouraged pupils to try to understand the 'life-world' of the believer in an empathetic manner. Cox (1983, 26) comments:

> The essence of this methodology is that you look at the religions as an external observer, try to understand what they mean to the believer, but do not raise the question of whether he is wise so to believe, or whether his belief corresponds to truth. Phenomenology is concerned with understanding how a religion is believed and practised and not with deciding whether or not it is true.

This approach gave rise to a considerable debate about the place of the teacher's own beliefs in education (e.g. Hulmes 1979).

Schools' Council 'Working Paper Number 36' (1971) was extremely influential in promoting the phenomenological approach to R.E. in schools. Underlying its approach, and of particular importance for this study, was the dominance at this time of the liberal model of education, which stems from the Enlightenment, and has as its axioms a belief in an over-arching, universally agreed form of human reason and 'objective' knowledge, and the autonomy and freedom of the individual. This can be seen in the following quotations:

> We would ask, therefore, if there is an approach to the study of religion in school which all fair-minded people can agree . . . . (Schools' Council 1971, 11)

> Objective teaching seeks to present evidence for beliefs, so that they can be accepted or rejected freely and intelligently. (p.24)
>
> Like all liberal education it [religious education] is concerned that such awareness and understanding should be founded on accurate information, rationally understood and considered in the light of all the relevant facts. (p.44)

This approach to liberal education is based on the views of Hirst (1974) who argued in the 1960s and 1970s that education was centrally about 'knowledge' and the critical use of human reason. The problem with R.E. and religious beliefs was that there were no publicly agreed criteria by which conflicting truth-claims could be settled and, therefore, they are to be seen as "a matter of personal preference". This means the school should be "genuinely uncommitted religiously" (see Hirst 1974, 181-182). Hirst's understanding of the epistemological status of religious belief seems to underlie the approach taken in Schools' Council 'Working Paper No.36'. In their discussion of the problems facing teachers who hold Christian beliefs they say:

> Education presupposes a common basis of agreement about what constitutes knowledge and what is only opinion. At the present time Christianity, in the view of the majority, falls in the second category. The beliefs of Christians (and those of other faiths and ideologies) can only, in these conditions be presented as 'what some people believe'. . . . . In brief, Christianity as truth no longer belongs to this common basis of agreement - except within the environment of the Church; it follows that outside this 'voluntary association' what Christians believe can only be classified as such, not as common knowledge shared by all.
> The teacher who is a Christian will find himself involved in both education and proclamation - he is both a Christian *teacher* and a *Christian* teacher. . . . In a secular education system he must stand on the side of education; his task is to educate children. . . .
> In speaking of education the Christian educator might argue that the child has a right to 'the best education possible'. He could go on to say that by this he means an education which would make children Christians. . . . . From the educational angle the objection, if the aim is to make children Christians, is the familiar one of indoctrination; or, put more bluntly, that what is only opinion or belief is being taught as truth. . . . Christianity must, therefore, be presented as 'what Christians believe', not 'what is the case'. (Schools' Council 1971, pp.92-93)

This has been quoted at length because it shows very clearly the hegemonic nature of the doctrine of liberal education at this time. Indeed there is much evidence, as we shall see in later chapters, to suggest that this view is still paramount among teachers, despite a number of recent critiques of liberal education coming from various different stances (evangelical Christian - Cooling 1994; Muslim - Ashraf in Shortt and Cooling eds. 1997,

Halstead and Khan-Cheema 1987, Sarwar 1994, Muslim Education Forum 1997; postmodern - Usher and Edwards 1994; philosophical - Polanyi 1958, MacIntyre 1988).

I shall return to various aspects of these critiques later in this chapter and in the analysis of my results. The main points to emphasise at this stage are the dominance of the liberal view in the 1960s, 1970s and continuing to the present, and the fact that this dominance is beginning to crumble. The epistemological question of the status of religious belief as 'true knowledge' is central to this debate.

The 1980s

Continuing unease

Even the changes in the practice of assemblies to make them more 'open' (which were described above) were not enough to quell the serious disquiet concerning collective worship. Souper and Kay (1983, 39-41), in an account of the evidence given to the House of Commons Select Committee for Education, Science and Arts in 1981, describe the opposition to the collective worship provision coming from "two diametrically opposed positions": the National Secular Society (on the grounds of lack of impartiality and imposed hypocrisy), and the British Evangelical Council (on the grounds that Christian worship cannot be validly undertaken by those not of Christian persuasion). They also noted the comment from the Church of England's Board of Education:

> The Board accepts the difficulty at the present time of implementing the law relating to a daily act of worship. . . . The problems are immense . . . . (quoted in Souper and Kay 1983, 38)

The Select Committee's recommendation was that

> the Secretary of State should now begin to have discussions with interested bodies, including the church authorities about guidance to schools (on the act of school worship). These discussions should include the possibility that legislative changes may be necessary. (p.40)

Similar concerns continued to be expressed throughout the 1980s. For example, a report from the National Association of Headteachers, published in 1985, expressed

> a concern in many places that the section of the (1944) Act entitled 'Religious Education in County and Voluntary Schools' is impossible to implement fully and honestly and properly. This particularly applies to the matter of morning assembly and the corporate act of worship. (NAHT 1985, 3)

The reason given for this concern was "the radical changes in the make-up and the mores of society since 1967 and more so since the Education Act of 1944" (p.3).

Multi-cultural education - the Swann Report (1985)

A major report from 1985 tried to tackle one aspect of these changes - the advent of multiculturalism. The central question of the Swann Report was how the education system should respond to the ethnic diversity of Britain. There was a particular concern about finding ways of tackling under-achievement by many pupils from ethnic minorities. The Swann committee developed the notion of 'Education for All' which reflected the diversity of British society and aimed at developing sensitivity towards the cultures and practices of ethnic minorities and promoting greater understanding and mutual respect between cultures. The report encouraged a positive attitude to plurality and diversity:

> The aim of education should be to ensure that from their earliest years children learn the accept the normality and justice of a variety of points of view without feeling threatened, and are indeed encouraged to find this variety of outlook stimulating in itself. (Swann Report 1985, 324)

With regard to religious education the report was unequivocal about the preferred approach for a multi-cultural society:

> We find ourselves firmly in favour of the broader phenomenological approach to religious education as the best and indeed the only means of enhancing the understanding of all pupils, from whatever religious background, of the plurality of faiths in contemporary Britain . . . . (p.474)

The Report's view on collective worhip was less than favourable:

> With regard to the requirement for a daily act of collective worship in every county and voluntary school, we do not believe that this requirement can continue to be justified with the multiplicity of beliefs and nonbeliefs now present in our society. We would not however wish to restrict the freedom of county schools to make provision for collective worship if it seems appropriate and is acceptable to their parents and pupils. Similarly however we believe the freedom *not* to make such provision should no longer be restricted by law. (p.497)

Swann was very firmly moving away from regarding Christianity as in any way superior to other faiths and from treating British culture as better than other cultures. Within this approach, questions of the truth or otherwise of conflicting religious beliefs were inevitably side-lined in the overwhelming desire to achieve parity of esteem between cultures. Underlying this was the notion that there was a framework under which it is possible to hold all the cultures together in a single school: and that framework was provided by the liberal ideal of education, now firmly multicultural in form and with an implicit relativism towards religious belief as the following quotation suggests:

> The concept of pluralism implies seeing the very diversity of such a society, in terms for example of the range of religious experience and the variety of languages and language forms, as an enrichment of the experience of all those within it. (Swann Report 1985, 5)

The re-emergence of the 'Christian heritage lobby'

In the late 1980s, in addition to the multicultural/multifaith approach, a strand of thinking emerged, or re-emerged, which was to have a powerful effect on the imminent legislation. It was essentially a combination of the Christian religious and the political 'right'. The former, largely those of evangelical or traditionalist views [e.g. Baroness Cox, Lord Thorneycroft, Burn and Hart (1988)], saw acts of collective worship as a vehicle to promote Christian belief and were firmly confessional in approach. This was, in part, based on the belief that the Christian faith is true, and therefore it is right and proper to seek to nurture children into that faith (Copley 1997, 140). The political right (much of the Conservative party) saw acts of collective worship as a means of advocating a common moral and cultural basis for life based on the Christian heritage of the country. As we shall see in the next section, the debate between the 'multi-cultural' and 'Christian heritage' lobbies was to rage fiercely in the passage of the 1988 Education Reform Act.

THE CURRENT DEBATE (FROM 1988)

The 1988 Education Reform Act

Out of this background emerged the 1988 Education Reform Act. This represented a political compromise between those who wished to follow the 'multicultural' path with its

assumptions of mutual respect and tolerance for all views and its implicit relativism, and those who wished to stress the Christian heritage of Britain and maintain a strong position for the Christian faith in British schools. It is well known that the religious clauses were not part of the original legislation and were only included after the interventions of Baroness Cox and her supporters during the House of Lords' debates in an attempt to secure the predominance of Christianity in school R.E. and collective worship. The story of the passage of the bill through Parliament has been well documented (e.g. Alves 1989, 1991; Cox and Cairns 1989; Harte 1991; Hull 1989a, 1991; Robson 1996; Copley 1997; Chadwick 1997, 88-94). The Bishop of London had acted as a broker during the passage of the bill in order to produce the end result. His comments on this process reflect the tensions between the 'Christian heritage' and 'multicultural' lobbies:

> Throughout the process of wrestling with the amendments we have tried to uphold five main principles. We have sought to provide a framework for worship which, first, maintains the tradition of worship as part of the process of education, giving proper place to the Christian religion; secondly, maintains the contribution of the collective act of worship to the establishment of values within the school community; yet, thirdly, does not impose inappropriate forms of worship on certain groups of pupils; fourthly, does not break the school up into communities based on the various faiths of the parents, especially in that it makes some groups feel that they are not really part of the community being educated in the school; and, lastly, is realisable and workable in practical terms of school accommodation and organisation. (Hansard 7.7.88 col.434)

The main end results of the protracted and tortuous debates which are relevant to this study were as follows: the school's task included promoting the pupils' "spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development" and "preparing them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life" [Education Reform Act 1988, section 1(2)]; the daily act of collective worship was still required for all pupils, but it could now take place at any time in the school day and with any normal school group - e.g. a class, year or house [section 6(1)&(2)]; worship was still not defined, but it must not be "distinctive of any particular Christian denomination", and the majority of acts of collective worship must be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" which meant that they should reflect "the broad traditions of Christian belief" [section 7 (1), (2), (3)]; schools could apply to the now mandatory SACRE for a 'determination' which released them from the

last requirement (such a 'determination' would only last 5 years, after which it would have to be renewed) [sections 11 &12]; worship must have regard to the "family background" and the "ages and aptitudes" of the pupils involved" [section 5]; R.E. was outside the new "National Curriculum", but maintained its special mandatory place by becoming part of the "basic curriculum" which was comprised of the National Curriculum plus R.E. [section 2]; and the parental right to withdraw their child from collective worship and/or R.E. and the similar teachers' rights were unchanged from the 1944 Education Act.

As stated above the final wording of the Act was very much a political compromise between what might be termed the 'Christian heritage' and the 'multicultural' lobbies. The former can be seen in the continuing mandatory requirement for daily collective worship and for R.E.; in the inclusion of the word 'Christian' for the first time in law; and in the convoluted specification of the type of worship that was to be conducted in schools. Hull (1991) examined the use of the metaphor 'mishmash' in the debates surrounding the passing of the 1988 Education Reform Act and concluded that in most cases the use of the 'mishmash' metaphor implied an attack on multicultural R.E. and collective worship and encouraged an undesirable tribalism (Hull 1991, 17). The latter can be seen in the requirement that the character of the collective worship should take into account the "family backgrounds", and "ages and aptitudes" of the pupils; and in the provision for 'determinations'. In addition, the permission to hold the act of collective worship at any time in the school day and in school groups other than the entire school (although done, in part, for practical reasons) can be seen as a weakening of the role of collective worship in setting the tone and ethos for the whole school day.

The immediate aftermath to the 1988 ERA

Controversy and confusion on all sides - and Circular 3/89

Whether or not the resulting legislation was a successful compromise which enacted the principles advocated by the Bishop of London must be in severe doubt given the amount

of controversy and confusion which followed the Act. Hull (1989b, 119) argued that the Act was educationally and theologically unsound, and potentially divisive. He wrote that it was "the most obscure and complicated piece of religious education legislation in the history of this country." Blight (1994, 52) concluded that "the 1988 worship requirements failed to address the key questions about the nature of modern society and the relationship between faith communities and schools and education and worship." There was much concern in faith communities and schools as to how the Act was to be interpreted and a multitude of articles, booklets and guidelines appeared from educationalists, churches and other faith communities, teachers' unions and other professional associations, and local education authorities (e.g. Copley 1989, Gent 1989, Hull 1989a).

Important guidance came from Circular 3/89 in which the Department of Education and Science summarised the requirements of the 1988 ERA as regards R.E. and collective worship, and attempted to give some indication as to how the obscure phrase "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" was to be interpreted. It said, "In the Secretary of State's view, an act of worship which is 'broadly Christian' need not contain only Christian material provided that, taken as a whole, it reflects the traditions of Christian belief" (DES, Circular 3/89, paragraph 34). It also suggested that "governing bodies and head teachers should seek to respond positively" to requests from parents, whose children have been withdrawn from R.E. and/or collective worship, for the provision of religious education and/or religious worship "according to a particular faith or denomination" provided there was no additional cost to the school. (paragraph 42). This last piece of guidance can be seen as seeking to make allowance for the reality of a diversity of faiths.

The immediate Muslim response

The mountain of literature could not quell the unease. The Muslim community, in particular, was concerned about an emerging Christian imperialism. In a leaflet entitled 'Education Reform Act 1988 - What can Muslims do?' (Sarwar 1989) it was suggested

that "some of the changes regarding collective worship and religious education pose major challenges and immediate problems for Muslim parents." (p.1). Muslim parents were encouraged to send a letter of withdrawal from collective worship and R.E. to the headteacher of their child's school (p.3).

The evangelical Christian response

In addition, many evangelical Christian teachers were experiencing difficulty with multi-faith R.E. and finding a real tension between their faith in Christ as the only saviour and their professional obligations to present other religions in an unbiased way (Association of Christian Teachers 1990). Both evangelical Christian and Muslim concerns since then have only grown stronger as we shall see below.

The teachers' response

There was deep unease, too, among the teachers' unions and associations, especially the headteachers who had to shoulder much of the responsibility for the implementation of the Act. In July 1989 a *T.E.S.* survey of headteachers produced only 1 out of 234 replies which expressed enthusiasm for the requirement that schools should hold a daily act of collective worship which is "broadly or mainly Christian in character." Furthermore 66% said they had insufficient space for a whole school assembly and 61% said they did not have the staff available to conduct Christian acts of worship. However, a major survey of heads of R.E. in all maintained secondary schools in England and Wales in the summer term of 1989 (with a 32% response) showed a more varied and ambivalent attitude (Culham College Institute 1989).

Legal cases

Despite considerable initial fears, there were not many legal cases concerning the interpretation of the Act and such as there were proved largely inconclusive.

An emerging orthodoxy and orthopraxis in the early 1990s

Despite these serious concerns most schools tried to work with the legislation and to make the most of it and a critical examination of the literature and guidelines produced by the local authorities, faith groups, teachers and professional bodies suggests that a broad consensus was emerging on how to manage the vexed question of collective worship. This orthodoxy and orthopraxis suggested that collective worship has at least five main characteristics.

Firstly, it is *sui generis*. McCreery (1993, 33) writes that collective worship "is a form of worship which is peculiar to schools. It does not have its basis in any religious community, but the educational process of the school." This is a continuation of the trend begun with the 1870 Education Act with its requirement of non-denominational worship. Gent (1989, 9) comments that "the reality is probably that schools are here being challenged to develop a unique kind of experience . . . ."

Secondly, it is educational. Hughes and Collins (1996, 8) say that "worship in the context of a school is first and foremost an educational activity." For the most part it is assumed that the model of education is the liberal one. The aim is to broaden children's understanding and to make them more aware of and sensitive to different world-views to enable them to make their own informed choices at the appropriate time, based on reliable and comprehensive information and sound reasoning. The freedom and right of the individual to make their own personal choices in matters of religious belief is a basic axiom. This approach does not presume that any one religion is any more valid or true than any other. Gent (1989, 7-8) agrees that assembly should be educational and sees this as entailing a proscription of evangelism, but he says that an investigation of evangelism in R.E. is perfectly acceptable. This all begs the questions of what is meant by 'education', what part the pursuit of truth plays in education, the question of indoctrination and the place of nurturing religious belief in education, and the presumed epistemological status of religious truth claims. I shall return to these issues in later chapters.

Thirdly, collective worship is inclusive. As Gent (1989, 6) puts it, "It should be an activity and experience to which, in principle, *all* can contribute and from which *all* can gain, no matter what their personal commitment or life-stance." It is frequently emphasised that school worship is collective, not corporate - i.e. it is a gathering of people from many different cultural and religious backgrounds. This means that the response to an act of worship is left open; no particular belief or commitment is assumed. Often there will be a period of silence or 'thinking time' at the end rather than a traditional prayer with all its implicit assumptions. The B.B.C. 'Together' programme (a radio assembly for schools) very deliberately takes into account the variety of cultural, social and religious backgrounds, the different levels of belief commitment, and so aims to allow response "on several levels" (BBC 1989, 2). The Secondary Heads Association has published a book of assembly ideas called 'Thought for the day' in which the 'thought' is simply followed by a corporate silence to allow for a variety of responses (Douglas 1995). The inclusivity requirement also means that material from many different sources is used including various faith traditions and other world-views. Many schools make use of the multifaith 'Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals' when planning their assembly programme. The termly 'Assembly Bulletin' produced by the London Borough of Redbridge, which gives practical ideas for school worship, is based on this calendar. School worship involves 'celebrating' the diversity of world-views, particularly those represented in the school. In addition, attitudes of tolerance, sensitivity, respect, understanding and awareness are encouraged towards the variety of beliefs. The NUT guidance given in 1989 said:

> The Union, whilst supporting the right of parents to withdraw their children on religious grounds, does not want to see a divisive spirit of intolerance grow up amongst different faiths in the school community - schools should be helping to foster tolerance and respect throughout their educational work, and in the past assemblies have played an important part in this. (NUT 1989, 8)

The emphasis on developing these attitudes can be so strong that the questions of different, contradictory or even unacceptable beliefs are sidelined, as is the issue of the truth of religious beliefs.

Fourthly, the powerful desire to have an occasion which includes the whole school community in all its diversity of beliefs and cultures means that there is frequently an emphasis on perceived common or shared values and school ethos and tone. This is very much in line with the DFE Circular 1/94 which states that collective worship should "develop community spirit, promote a common ethos and shared values, and reinforce positive attitudes" (DFE 1/94, paragraph 50). The same circular also requires schools to encourage children to develop "a clear set of personal values and beliefs" (paragraph 9). This raises the question of the relative status of the common and personal values. How do they interact? Who decides what the common values will be? There is a fundamental paradox here: schools are being asked to provide pupils with the means to construct their own values and beliefs (and not to presume the truth or validity of any particular view), whilst simultaneously promoting a school ethos which is based on perceived common values. Are the common values restricted to desired modes of behaviour, or do they include common beliefs about the nature and purpose of human life? If so, then where does the question of the truth and validity of these common values and beliefs fit into this system which is so anxious to avoid making judgements about the beliefs of individuals?

Fifthly, the current orthodoxy and orthopraxis are based on a 'worth-ship' model of collective worship (e.g. Hughes and Collins 1996, 7, Webster 1995, 50ff). The definition of worship is seen, not in the narrow religious sense of offering worship to a transcendent God, but in the broader sense of valuing things considered to be of ultimate worth or value. This often means giving opportunity for: a sense of awe and wonder, reflection on various human values and ideals, celebration of achievements of various kinds, and for exploring our inner 'spirituality'. Frequently, this broad definition of worship leads to the focus of the worship being immanent rather than transcendent, and this typically takes the form of a moral emphasis rather than a religious one. Copley speaks of "the rise of the secular sermon" to describe the trend towards moral homilies which has been particularly prevalent in secondary schools (Copley 1989, 28). Part of the reason for this is that there

seems to be far greater agreement on certain moral values than there is on religious beliefs.

The current orthodoxy and orthopraxis is widely and well documented. (e.g. Gent 1989, Webster 1995 - chapter 6, Hughes and Collins 1996, R.E Council of England and Wales 1996, Bedfordshire Education Service 1989, 1995, Hertfordshire Education Services 1989, 1995, Suffolk County Council Education Department 1995, British Council of Churches 1989, Free Church Federal Council 1990, Churches' Joint Education Policy Committee 1995, Association of Teachers and Lecturers 1995, British Humanist Association 1996). There are, of course, variations in the emphasis in these publications. For example, the churches want to allow more room for the possibility of worship in the religious sense whilst the British Humanist Association thinks this should not occur at all in state schools. However, there is a broad practical consensus on many of the desirable features of school assemblies. It is well summed up in Copley's 'thought for the day' model where he says that school worship should: accept all beliefs as valid; encourage tolerance and respect; recognize pluralism; entail the leader expressing a viewpoint and offering it for reflection; and not presume any particular response or belief in the participants (Copley 1989, 32-43).

Reactions to the orthodoxy and orthopraxis

As time went by in the 1990s it became increasingly clear that this fragile consensus did not appeal to everyone. The trend in recent years has been toward greater polarisation in views rather than consensus. Crudely speaking, both sides of the debate have sought to strengthen their position in different ways.

The 'Christian heritage' lobby, Circular 1/94 and the OFSTED inspection schedule

There had been dissatisfaction from the 'Christian heritage' lobby that the Act had not done enough to reinforce the nation's traditional Christian foundation as expressed in school worship. They realised that the chances of changing the primary legislation were

very slim and, therefore, they sought to influence its interpretation. For example, the Christian Action Research and Education (CARE) policy statement says:

> CARE is constitutionally committed to upholding the Christian heritage of our country and therefore supports the principles of collective school worship and religious education that were restated in the Education Reform Act of 1988.
> We believe the law rightly reflects the central significance of the Christian faith in our national life, affording all our children the opportunity for education in the Christian religion and the experience of Christian worship while respecting the conscience of teachers and pupils who prefer not to take part.
> We therefore seek in every way to encourage the implementation of the law, ...
> . . . We judge that alternatives to the present position, with all its imperfections and ambiguities, would lead inevitably to a thoroughly secularised system. (CARE 1995)

There were two very significant developments with regard to the way in which the law was to be implemented and interpreted which swung the balance distinctly in the direction of the 'Christian heritage' lobby.

The first was the issuing of Circular 1/94 (DFE 1994) which sought to give guidance and interpretation concerning R.E. and collective worship. It said that although school worship was not defined in the legislation it "should be concerned with reverence or veneration paid to a divine being or power" (paragraph 57), and should "aim to provide an opportunity for pupils to worship God" (paragraph 50). It must also "contain some elements which relate specifically to the traditions of Christian belief and which accord a special status to Jesus Christ" (paragraph 63).

The second was the OFSTED Inspection Schedule issued in 1995, but with some precursors, which included the following 'bullet points' to help inspectors form their judgements about the "character and quality of worship in schools":

- worship is generally understood to imply a recognition of a supreme being. It should be clear that the words used and/or the activities observed in worship recognise the existence of a deity;
- much that is identifiably Christian in tone, may not necessarily mention Jesus . . . . However, if the worship consistently avoids reference to Jesus within the spoken or written word then it could not reasonably be defined as mainly Christian; (OFSTED 1995c, 93).

Both of these attempts to insist on the Christian character of school worship have been widely resented and opposed, particularly by the teaching organisations.

The multicultural lobby

There was a storm of outrage amongst the multicultural lobby that an ideology of Christian imperialism was at work. In the 1993 Hockerill Lecture Hull argued that the draft of what was to become Circular 1/94 reflected a "government departmental theology" which had emerged in the previous five years. This theology was characterised by: the desire to teach religions as discrete units, which led to the marginalisation of religions other than Christianity; an emphasis on Christianity as integral to British national heritage, which was divisive and took little account of the contemporary multicultural realities; the view that Christianity must predominate. Hull argues that this government theology of Christianity in education is flawed and morally offensive. He sets out his own position at the end of the lecture:

> There is another Christianity which says "I am not holy; I am on the way; my spirituality and that of the tradition I represent is incomplete. But I have an affinity with you, my Muslim brother, my Jewish friend, my Hindu colleague, if you also are prepared to say, 'I am not holy; I am on the way; the tradition I represent is not complete'". Then we will both say, "but the ground where we meet is holy ground because this is the place where we claim our complete humanity." (Hull 1993).

Hull's critique does not really deal with the question of conflicting truth claims. As the above quotation shows his basic theological position might be called a progressive pluralist view which suggests that all faiths have part of the truth, and it is only when they meet together that progress can be made towards complete humanity. Truth is found in dialogue.

The growing critique of liberal education and its assumptions

Another important twist in the story comes from the critiques of liberal education coming from at least five directions: evangelical Christians, the Muslim community, postmodern perspectives, from philosophical viewpoints, and from the Chief Executive of the QCA..

From evangelical and other Christians

Some evangelical Christians were far from happy with what they saw as the pervasive and dominant ethos of liberal education that prescribed an approach to religious belief which was unacceptable to them as it implied that such beliefs could not count as genuine knowledge and effectively treated the question of the 'truth' of religious belief as insoluble in principle. Cooling (1994), starting from his experience as a Christian and as a teacher, considers the tension between his evangelical Christian commitment and liberal secular education. He argues that the latter sees religious belief as relative, instrumental and subjective, rather than "making absolute statements about reality" (Cooling 1994, 1). He refuses to have his beliefs reduced to this status and argues for a 'critical realist' view which fully recognises the commitment of the believer and that the believer sees his beliefs as "propositional truth about God" (p.49) and "making statements about the nature of reality" (p.88). Cooling is very aware of the fact that we live in a plural world with competing truth claims and so requires the believer to debate the truth of his beliefs with others - "Truth that listens" (p.2). However, the liberal framework which consigns competing religious truth claims to the status of differing opinions with no rational way of discriminating between them will not do. He says:

> In the final analysis, having considered the evidence carefully, I must say another belief is wrong if it fundamentally conflicts with my own beliefs. . . . Right and wrong, truth and falsity are issues that cannot be ducked if we are to take rationality seriously. Rationality entails conflict of beliefs. (Cooling 1994, 89)

Cooling argues against an objective, neutral, liberal educational theory as the only framework for education. He stresses the importance of making the presuppositions of any educational theory more explicit. He says "everyone . . . has to build their educational values on presuppositions. . . . education cannot be religiously neutral" (p.101). His version of state schooling emphasises the importance of the pursuit of truth (p.107) and teaching the "skill of conversation" (p.106). The issue of conflicting truth claims should not be avoided. He comments:

> There are many tenable religions and it is the job of the secular schools to help children to understand this fact. This should not, of course, be done in a way that

> implies that truth does not matter. Nor should we hide the conflicts that exist between the beliefs of the different religions. (p.108)

There are three crucial points in Cooling's critique which are central to this study. Firstly, the refusal to be squeezed into the framework of liberal, secular education with all its assumptions about the nature of religious beliefs and truth claims. Secondly, the need to expose the presuppositions of any educational philosophy. Thirdly, the stress on the question of truth - that it cannot be avoided.

These ideas are developed by Smith (1997) who argues that the Enlightenment model of objective knowledge which underpinned liberal education has been superceded and a new approach is needed for a plural society which openly recognizes the place of beliefs and values (Smith 1997).

Wright (1993) also argues against the hegemony of liberal education and for the importance of the question of truth in R.E.. He comments that

> the liberal consensus in our present society that suggests that religious belief is a private, optional and unimportant extra is itself the embodiment of a particular set of beliefs about the nature of reality. (Wright 1993, 64).

He acknowledges that religious belief is highly ambiguous and that there are many views. However, good R.E. should engage with ultimate questions of meaning and truth, which at present it ignores. He sees a need for a new agenda for religious education which is more appropriate for the needs of a diverse pluralistic democracy. In this agenda the pursuit of truth should not be considered futile.

(See also Thiessen 1993 and Watson 1987 for Christian critiques of the assumptions of liberal education and a defence of Christian nurture and the centrality of the question of truth).

From the Muslim community

There is another very important critique of liberal education to consider - which comes from the Muslim community. As there are approximately half a million Muslim children of school age in Britain this is a significant element in the debate. There have been consistent criticisms of the provision for RE and collective worship from this quarter. In the immediate aftermath of the 1988 ERA it was the question of withdrawal as a survival tactic in the face of what was seen as legalised Christian imperialism. In the event not that many exercised this right, partly because of a reluctance to split off, and partly because of the implementation of the 'determination' procedure by some schools. There have been two notable exceptions: the mass withdrawal of Muslim children from R.E. at Kirklees school in West Yorkshire in 1996; and the provision of faith-based RE at Birchfield Community school near Birmingham, also in 1996. The general trend in the Muslim community since the 1988 ERA has been one of growing criticism of the liberal, multifaith provision and the perceived Christian bias. In terms of the legislation it is argued that not enough emphasis is put on the worship being appropriate to the pupils' ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds. The Muslim Educational Trust has argued that:

> School assemblies provide valuable focal points in the school day or week. Collective worship, though, is only meaningful when people of the same faith willingly come together to participate in an act of religious devotion. Islam allows only worship of the one God - Allah. Muslim children should not be forced to go against this basic tenet of their faith . . . .
> Organising meaningful collective worship has proved impossible in many state schools . . . .
> We are increasingly coming to the view that there should be no statutory requirement for collective worship. In schools that choose to organise acts of collective worship, pupils should opt in, rather than opt out, by the written consent of parents. (Muslim Educational Trust 1995, 3-4)

The Muslim critique does not rest only on the fact that the present collective worship provision can easily compromise the children's faith. There is also a deeper conflict with liberal educational ideals and the way these treat religious belief and its truth. Sarwar has argued that:

> Muslims find it difficult to accept some parts of the school curriculum, not because the subjects are prohibited per se, but because their methodology of teaching is against the Guidance of Allah. The latter must be the ultimate yardstick for Muslims. (Sarwar 1994, 2)

The clash of educational philosophy is seen most clearly in a recent statement from the Muslim Education Forum (MEF) on R.E. and collective worship:

> Members and supporters of MEF wish to register their strongly felt concern about the anti-religious and in particular the anti-Muslim tone permeating any national debate under the guise of post modern secularism in education. . . .
> If we do not take up the challenge posed by post modern secularism within Europe as Muslims, Christians, or Jews, then we will have only ourselves to blame for the incomplete and deficient nature of educational services which our future generations receive.
> We have a duty as Muslims to share with the world, in all humility and with wisdom (*Hikma*) our belief that every child deserves the opportunity of a life with God. (Muslim Education Forum 1997, 1)

Ashraf (1997, 272ff) writes in similar vein, "To resist the corrosive influences of the secularist worldviews that brainwash our children and create in them uncertainty about values, it is necessary for religious groups to stand together." He argues that the common beliefs of religious groups are beliefs in: Transcendental Reality and the "transcendental character of truth"; the essence of the spiritual dimension in each human being; and certain "eternal and fundamental values."

Many sections of the Muslim community are not prepared to be compromised by the assumptions of liberal secular education, and are exposing these as the assumptions of one worldview. Central in this critique is the question of the truth of the Muslim view. They are not prepared to see Muslim beliefs treated as relative and subjective by an alien educational ideology.

From postmodern perspectives

A third important critique of liberal education comes from postmodern thought. Usher and Edwards (1994) comment:

> Education is, we would argue, particularly resistant to the postmodern 'message'. Educational theory and practice is founded on the discourse of modernity and its self-understandings have been forged by that discourse's basic and implicit assumptions. Historically, education can be seen as the vehicle by which modernity's

> 'grand narratives', the Enlightenment ideals of critical reason, individual freedom, progress and benevolent change, are substantiated and realised. (Usher and Edwards 1994, 2)

Despite their rather tortuous comments about the self-contradiction of a discussion of education from a postmodern perspective (pp1-2), they do make the important point that "education itself is going through profound change in terms of purposes, content and methods. These changes are part of a process that, generally, questions the role of education as the child of the Enlightenment." (p.3). Postmodern thought has challenged some of the basic assumptions of education, and especially the Enlightenment ideals of an over-arching rationality to which all reasonable people subscribe and an objective knowledge which relegates religious belief to the realm of private opinion.

From philosophical viewpoints

We need to note at this stage the critiques of both Polanyi (1958) who argues against the idea of an entirely objective, impersonal knowedge, and MacIntyre (esp.1988) who argues against the concept of a socially-disembodied rationality and that liberal rationalism is properly seen as only one of a number of traditions of rationality. I shall return to these important critiques in later chapters.

From the Chief Executive of the QCA

The critique of liberal education (especially its neutrality towards certain basic values) has come from a fifth direction - Dr. Nick Tate, the Chief Executive of QCA (formerly SCAA, formerly NCC). In calling for a national debate on moral values he attacked what he called 'moral relativism', which he defined as follows:

> By relativism I mean the view that morality is largely a matter of taste or opinion, that there is no such thing as moral error and there is no point therefore in searching for the truth about moral matters or in arguing or reasoning about it.
> (Tate 1996, para. 15)

He cites the research of Arnot in a study of trainee teachers:

> The . . . study, if I read it right, suggests that trainee teachers are deeply reluctant to do anything which might suggest that they are imposing ethnocentric, class or gender values on their pupils, as if the truth of a value were always relative to its subject and never universal. (para 17)

Tate argues that this moral relativism is "but one part of the wider intellectual currents which over the last hundred years have transformed most of the disciplines through which we attempt to see the rest of the world," and, in particular, he attacks "postmodernism with its simultaneous and dispiriting rejection both of universal values and of our traditional sense of the significance of the culturally specific." (para 24). For Tate, "If ever a dragon needed slaying, it is the dragon of relativism." (para 25). He declares that "what is clear is the importance of ensuring that young people grow up with a sense that there are objective and enduring values, that some things are certain, that there is some kind of lodestar within all this flux." (para.28). Although Tate focuses on the question of moral relativism it is clear that the issue of epistemological relativism is not far away. Longley (1996), commenting on Tate's address, spoke of "the concept of religious pluralism, by which all accounts of the ultimate truth - Christian, Jewish, Muslim, whatever - were to be given equal respect." Longley sees this as "one of the influences in society since the war that almost everyone has gone along with." Despite Tate arguing that "religious education in maintained schools is not about persuading young people of the truth of religious claims," he immediately goes on to say that "it is (among other things) about teaching them the nature of these claims." (Tate 1996, para 37).

The importance and consequences of these critiques

These critiques suggest that the questions of the nature of religious belief and the competing truth claims of the different religions and worldviews (including liberal education) need to be explored in relation to collective worship in schools if a satisfactory policy is ever to be developed out of the present quagmire. I shall return to this central issue in the analysis of my results (chapters 4-7) and in my final conclusions (chapter 8).

A trend towards greater diversity in schooling provision

One possible direction in which these critiques of liberal education could lead is towards greater diversity of schooling - with each school having their basic philosophies and values clearly stated. The government 'white paper', 'Choice and Diversity' (DFE 1992)

seemed to lean in this direction, and in January 1998 Muslim schools were given state money to bring them into line with Church and Jewish schools. The same logic could clearly apply to other groups. Holmes (1992) has argued that in an increasingly pluralist society with competing views, the common school is doomed to be a 'low doctrine' one which represents only those values which are necessary to hold a school together, and that a new vision is needed which allows common schools to develop more distinctive values according to their tradition and locality.

A trend which seeks the common ground - the growing emphasis on moral, spiritual, and citizenship education

There are those, however, who argue for a quite different solution to the diversity of views in a plural society - and that is to develop more fully those ideas which have the potential to unite people of all faiths and none and to use this as a basis for the school assembly. There are three main contenders: moral, spiritual, and citizenship education.

Moral and values education

Reference has been made above to the launch of a national debate in 1996 on moral values by the then SCAA in an attempt to give schools a basis on which to develop their ethos and shared values (National Forum for Values in Education and the Community 1996). This was a practical exercise to discover which values were agreed upon as a matter of fact. It did not seek to make any comments about their provenance or by what authority they received their sanction, recognising that there would be wide variation in beliefs in this area. A broad spectrum of interested parties covering educationalists, faith and other communities, and others came up with a statement of agreed values in October 1997. This had been preceded by calls by the Archbishop of Canterbury (House of Lords, 5 July 1996) and Mrs. Frances Lawrence (*Times* 21/10/96) for an agreement on moral values.

There has been a steady and growing literature concerning values and moral education. (e.g. Beck 1998, Shepherd 1998, Taylor 1998, Inter Faith Network 1997, Halstead and

Taylor 1996, Ainsworth and Brown 1995) and many regard this as a good way forward because in the area of moral values there is at least *de facto* agreement on a large area. The interesting questions are what authority such values have if they are shorn of their roots, and whether or not these values will persist.

Spiritual education

Some, however, recognised that something more than moral education was needed as a possible replacement for collective worship. The delightfully vague and all-encompassing word 'spiritual' was introduced in the 1944 Education Act and retained in the 1988 ERA - the 'spiritual development' of the child is part of the school's statutory obligations [Education Act 1944, section 7; Education Reform Act 1988, section 2(a)]. Hull (1995, 35) called for the phrase "collective worship" to be replaced by "collective spirituality." OFSTED has attempted to define the term in order to help school inspectors in their evaluation of this aspect of school life:

> Spiritual development relates to that aspect of inner life through which pupils acquire insights into their personal existence which are of enduring worth. It is characterised by reflection, the attribution of meaning to experience, valuing a non-material dimension to life, and intimations of an enduring reality. 'Spiritual' is not synonymous with 'religious'; all areas of the curriculum may contribute to pupils' spiritual development. (OFSTED 1994b, 8)

By attaching the label "inner life" to the word spiritual OFSTED is operating firmly within the liberal educational model which wishes to keep such things in the private, subjective zone so that potential conflicts of beliefs can be avoided. The 'truth' of such spiritual beliefs and attitudes is private to the individual. As with moral and values education there is a substantial and growing literature surrounding the notion of spiritual development. (e.g. Hay with Nye 1998, Priestley 1996, Brown and Furlong 1996, Hull 1995, Hay 1990).

Citizenship education

This is the newest arrival and contender for common ground. Again it stems from the schools' statutory obligations - this time to prepare pupils for adult life [1988 Education

Reform Act, section 2(b)]. It can be seen as an attempt to provide a framework for enabling people to live together in a plural society of very differing beliefs. Barber (1998, 1) has argued for "a new concept of citizenship" to underpin the ethos of the education system for the 21st century. Whether or not it can be developed into anything more than a pragmatic survival policy remains to be seen (see Beck 1998).

All three of the above (moral and values education, spiritual development, citizenship education) can be seen as ways of providing a new rationale for assemblies which would command wide assent and avoid the problems of conflicting and diverse religious beliefs and worldviews. They do not attempt to deal with the issues of the truth of religious belief, but keep such issues firmly in the private domain - i.e a matter of personal choice. I will return to these issues in the analysis of results.

Continuing unease and non-compliance

OFSTED reports on collective worship (1994a, 1995a, 1998a) have shown widespread non-complicance with the legal requirements - approximately 80% of secondary schools and 20% of primary schools fail in this respect. Some are quite blatant in not intending to do anything about this because they consider the law to be deeply unsatisfactory. Throughout the period since the 1944 Education Act and especially since the 1960s there have been countless calls for debate and discussion concerning collective worship in schools. This shows no sign of slackening.

The way forward?

The most recent and comprehensive attempt at consultation produced three possible ways forward: (1) a 'new way forward' based on a statutory requirement for regular assemblies of a moral and spiritual character, with the present requirement for collective worship being withdrawn; (2) maintenance of the present requirements either entirely or substantially in their present form; and (3) the withdrawal of the present requirements without replacement (R.E. Council of England and Wales 1998, 22). Most of the

teachers' bodies and local authority groups favoured the first option, but there were considerable reservations amongst the faith communities, and the report concluded:

> A possible route for the future has been indicated as a result of the review although for such a way to be fully acceptable, especially to some of the faith communities and perhaps also to the general public whose reactions had not been canvassed, further development work needs to be done on it. . . . It is therefore recommended that, building on the substantial results achieved through this review, the DfEE should now take over the baton and establish a governmental review of collective worship. (R.E. Council of England and Wales 1998, 36)

This conclusion seems to be as close to admitting defeat as the report could respectably go. The divisions and disagreements remain as profound as ever.

CONCLUSION - THE PLACE OF THIS STUDY

Almond (1988, 105-106) describes

> the classic dilemma of liberalism: on the one hand, it is committed to pluralism in a permissive sense; on the other it is first and foremost a society, and if it is to perpetuate itself and retain its distinctive character, then its own cultural traditions, which include the moral and ideal elements of liberalism, must play a role in the education of the young.

i.e. Liberalism, in order to stand, needs to perpetuate its own ethos, thus contradicting its own premise. This dilemma is profound and sharply focused in the issue of collective worship in schools. Almond goes on to argue that this dilemma cannot be resolved without a consideration both of "the epistemological difficulties" which are "concerned with the question of truth . . . . What is it to be right or wrong about religion . . .?" and also of the "ethical difficulties" - "What sort of respect do we owe to other people? Have they a right to their opinions, no matter how misguided and irrational these may be?" (p.105).

The liberal consensus has a profound hold on the system of education. Usher and Edwards (1994) argue that it defines it as we have known it. However, the advent of a plural and postmodern society means that this consensus is breaking down and deep epistemological and ethical questions arise. The postmodern situation presents us with

the Scylla of relativism and nihilism (with no absolute truth to be found) on one side and the Charybdis of fundamentalism (with exclusive truth only found in a number of competing places) on the other. All these issues are focused in collective worship in schools. Teachers are in a frontier situation trying to work out how competing beliefs and ideologies can live together. This study takes an in-depth, critical look at how they are managing this task, and in particular the question of the status of religious belief in contemporary society.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

This study is a qualitative one which falls within the 'interpretive' tradition of sociological research and seeks to use the ideas of Glaser and Strauss (1967) for developing a 'grounded theory'. This involves a reflexive approach in which the processes of data collection and data analysis are interwoven. Ideas generated in the early stages of the research can be tested out in the later stages, and subsequent data collection can be guided by the needs of the emerging theory.

The methods used to collect data were fourfold.

Participant Observation of the current practice of collective worship in a sample of schools in Luton, Bedfordshire. The sample included two infant, five junior, one primary and four secondary schools which, between them, covered the statutory school age range from 5 to 16 years.

Semi-structured interviews with teachers who led acts of collective worship. Thirty seven main interviews of this type were conducted. This method provided the most detailed and nuanced data. A prime aim in both the interview and the participant observation was to see whether or not there were any particular understandings of religious belief which underpinned the way the worship was conducted (either by design or in practice).

A questionnaire for the teachers interviewed. This served two purposes: to collect some additional information, and to allow for some respondent validation of my interim findings.

A critical analysis of the "official" documents surrounding collective worship in schools (e.g. government legislation, circulars and other papers; LEA guidelines and Agreed Syllabuses; assembly material books; and individual school policies; papers from teachers' unions and other professional bodies) to see whether or not there are any particular understandings of religious belief which underlie the literature.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The nature of social research - different paradigms and approaches

The first methodological issue I faced is the fact that there are different understandings of the nature of social research. I needed to establish which approach to use and why. There are many descriptions of the range of perspectives (e.g. May 1993, chapters 1&2; Cohen and Manion 1994, chapter 1; Denzin and Lincoln 1994, chapter 1). LeCompte and Preissle (1993, 23) suggest three main paradigms - positivist, interpretivist, and critical theorist. They comment that there is a "heated debate . . . over differences between positivists, interpretivists, and critical theorists with regard to research questions, epistemology, researcher stance, research goals, and subject - or participant - roles."

The positivist paradigm

The names of Comte and Durkheim are associated with the positivist view which has seen social science as modelled on the natural sciences and therefore concentrating on observable 'facts' and looking for general laws to which those facts conform. This tradition of social research has tended to stress the quantitative analysis of data and has been and still is, but to a lesser extent, very influential in social research.

Durkheim (1972) argued that there are 'social facts' concerning the way people live which are there to be observed and discovered by the social scientist. He argued that "social facts are to be treated as things" (p.58), and that a social fact is "to be recognised by the power of external coercion which it exercises or is capable of exercising over individuals", and it "exists independently of the individual forms it assumes in all its diffusion." (p.64) For Durkheim the primary unit for sociological analysis was the collectivity and not the individual and the subjective meanings which he attaches to his actions. He says, "for a social fact to exist, several individuals, at the very least, must have contributed their action; and it is this combined action which has created a new product" (p.71). The sociologist's task is then to formulate patterns and general laws to which these social facts conform, the basic principles being that:

> *The determining cause of a social fact must be sought among antecedent social facts and not among states of individual consciousness.* (p.74)

and that

> *The function of a social fact must always be sought in its relation to some social end.* (p.74)

There are at least two major problems with such an approach for this study of acts of collective worship. Firstly, it assumes that there are social facts which can be directly observed and described. This assumption is difficult to maintain given that it is now widely recognised by scientists of all persuasions that all observation involves some degree of interpretation by the observer. The values, moral judgements and ideology of the observer cannot be ignored. As Berger and Kellner (1981, 43) point out, "there are no 'raw facts' in science; there are only facts within a specific conceptual framework." In "ordinary life," too, "there are no 'raw facts'" only facts "embodied in structures of relevance and meaning." Observations made of acts of collective worship in schools will inevitably be partial and to some extent biased by the observer's presence and by the way he interprets what he sees. This aspect of observation must be taken into account.

Secondly, it can be argued that human behaviour is fundamentally different from the world investigated by the physical sciences because central to such behaviour are the meanings which we attach to our actions and, therefore, a method of investigation which virtually ignores these meanings cannot provide an adequate account of human behaviour. As Parkin (1992, 19) puts it, "Social facts are . . . partially created by the reasons people give for their own behaviour." This research focuses on the teachers' understandings of the activity in which they are engaged (i.e. leading collective worship). It needs in the main to concentrate on interpretive material.

<u>The interpretive paradigm</u>

For an alternative approach we can turn to the work of Weber. He stressed that the social world consists of subjective understandings and that the aim of the social scientist should

be to try to see life through the eyes of those whom he is studying, using their categories, values and ways of interpreting the world. Weber says:

> Interpretive sociology considers the individual and his action as the basic unit, ... In this approach, the individual is . . . the sole carrier of meaningful conduct. . . In general, for sociology, such concepts as 'state,' 'association,' 'feudalism,' and the like, designate certain categories of human interaction. Hence it is the task of sociology to reduce these concepts to 'understandable' action, that is, without exception, to the actions of participating individual men. (Weber, in Gerth and Wright Mills, eds., 1948, 55)

Parkin (1988, 17) points out, "No-one was more insistent than Weber that the fundamental unit of investigation must always be the individual." He goes on to say

> because it is the task of social science to penetrate the subjective understandings of the individual, to get at the motives for social action, this enterprise is bound to be quite different from that undertaken by the natural sciences. . . . People, unlike molecules or planets, have motives for their actions. Their behaviour is guided by subjective meanings. What is more, social actors have their own ideas and explanations as to why they behave in the way that they do, and these ideas and explanations themselves are an indispensible part of any comprehensive account of their conduct. (p.18)

The task is, then, to discover and analyse the subjective understandings of the individual. Worsley (1977, 77) comments that those who work within this 'interpretive' framework of sociological enquiry

> aim to start from their appreciation as ordinary human beings of the social phenomena they are studying . . . tend to see prior hypotheses about the phenomena as more of an impediment than a help. . . . try . . . to become involved in the activity or situation they are seeking to interpret . . . pursue their understanding of it through learning what other people involved in the activity or situation understand about it.

This study will work primarily with a Weberian interpretive approach because the principal aim is to uncover the teachers' understandings of what they are doing when they lead an act of collective worship. It will involve the use of the method which Weber called 'verstehen': that is, as Parkin (1988, 19) puts it, "for the investigator to try to identify with the actor and his motives and to view the course of conduct through the actor's eyes rather than his own." There are several well known difficulties with this method: these will be looked at below in the section on participant observation.

The critical paradigm

As LeCompte and Preissle (1993, 26) say:

> Critical theory, the tradition underlying critical ethnography, traces its roots to Marxism and neo-Marxism and seeks to illuminate how the distribution of power, privileges, resources, status, authority, leadership, and decision-making affects society, culture, technology, and science itself. Most particularly, critical theory is directed to examining how inequitable distributions lead to inequalities among groups and individuals. . . .
> Critical ethnography has been especially important in research on education and schooling, examining how groups use symbols, social practices, myths, and rituals of schooling to create and maintain inequitable distributions of power, prestige, and resources

Jupp (1996, 304ff) describes the differences between critical, positivist, and interpretive or phenomenological approaches:

> First, positivism emphasizes explanations cast in causal terms, whereas critical research does not; secondly, while both interpretative and critical perspectives are concerned with social meanings, the former places emphasis on how these are generated in small-scale interactions, whereas the latter seeks to analyse them critically in terms of structural inequalities in society.

He goes on to identify a number of central assumptions within the critical tradition:

> First, *prevailing knowledge* . . . is viewed as being structured by existing sets of social relations which constitute social structure. Secondly, this structure is seen as oppressive in so far as there is an unequal relation between groups within it and in so far as one or more groups exercise power over others. Thirdly, the inequality, power and oppression are rooted in class, race or gender or some combination of these. Fourthly, the aim of critical analysis is not to take prevailing knowledge for granted or to treat it as some 'truth', but to trace back such knowledge to structural inequalities at particular intersections in history.

Although my research is primarily in the interpretive tradition, these insights from critical theory are valuable in looking at the political, social and educational context within which the teachers are operating and, in particular, lead to some useful questions to ask about the official policy documents. Part of the debate concerning collective worship in schools has been over whether it is being used as a vehicle to create a particular national identity, which involves the predominance of the Christian faith. In addition, a significant part of the findings are concerned with the power and influence of the teacher in collective worship. I will make use of some of the insights of critical theory in the analysis, although

this does not provide the overall theoretical framework, which, as stated above, is an interpretive one.

A qualitative approach

The data collected was primarily qualitative rather than quantitative. The subtleties and nuances of the teachers' views were unlikely to be discovered in the type of data collection (e.g. a survey questionnaire or strictly structured interview) which would allow significant quantitative analysis. In recent years there has been a substantial growth in the role and status of qualitative research within the totality of social research and many publications have described its assumptions and procedures (e.g. Mason 1996, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, Bryman and Burgess 1994, Denzin and Lincoln 1994, LeCompte and Preissle 1993, Dey 1993, Strauss and Corbin 1990, Miles and Huberman 1984). By its very nature qualitative research is idiosyncratic and there are many different ways in which it can be carried out, each carrying its own assumptions and limitations. LeCompte and Preissle (1993, 23) comment:

> Since the mid-1980s, ethnography and qualitative research designs have moved from marginal, or merely complementary (Jaeger, 1988), methods in the social sciences and education to a position of assured legitimacy. However, the debate over how and why such methods should be used or in what form their results should be presented persists.

The crucial thing for such a researcher is to make explicit the assumptions and limitations of the method used. This will be done in the sections below when I describe the principal methods used in the research.

A 'grounded theory'

This interpretive, qualitative approach could lead to an end-result of the research which is primarily a description (in their terms) of the way those who lead acts of collective worship understand the activity; and of their patterns of thinking about the nature of religious belief as reflected in the process. In order to try to move beyond description towards a deeper analysis this study also draws on the approach of 'grounded theory' as pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In their view social research in the 1960s was

preoccupied with the verification of theory to the detriment of the development of theory. They sought to encourage the discovery of theory from data and to examine the processes by which this could be done. Their original book, 'The discovery of Grounded Theory' (1967) has been very influential in emphasing the generation of theory from data. They define 'grounded theory' as "the discovery of theory from data - systematically obtained and analysed in social research" (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 1). In a later publication, Strauss and Corbin (1990, 23) define a grounded theory as

> one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon.

The method uses "a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" (ibid., p.24). This approach assumes that the data collection and analysis stages of the research are interwoven throughout the whole research process. Ideas formed at an early stage can then be tested out at a later stage.

Glaser and Strauss (1967, 101ff) describe grounded theory as "the constant comparative method" of analysis. This is because there is a continuing interplay between data and theory. The analysis is an iterative process. I will describe in more detail the nature of the process of generating a grounded theory in the sections below on observation, interviews and documentary analysis.

The 'truth' of religious belief

Central to this study is the teachers' understanding of the 'truth' of religious belief and how this is handled in the context of collective worship. The concept of the 'truth' of religious belief is highly problematic and complex as indicated in chapter one. The methodological approach adopted here entails deliberately not seeking to give a prior definition of what I or others (e.g. philosophers, theologians, educationalists) may mean by such a phrase. Rather it seeks to develop an understanding of it, in an inductive manner, from the data collected. It may be that the teachers are developing new

understandings of the nature of religious belief through their experience of collective worship, or it may be that their understandings correspond with already defined views.

Why this qualitative, interpretive, 'grounded theory' approach has been adopted

This qualitative, interpretive, 'grounded theory' approach, which focuses on the issue of how the question of the 'truth' of religious belief is being handled in the semi-public context of school collective worship, has been adopted because learning how to live in a religiously plural world remains a crucial and unfinished task. This study seeks to contribute to that task by looking at how one particular group of people (i.e. teachers) are responding to the issues of diversity of belief in a plural society in a situation where they are very sharply focused (i.e. collective worship in schools). There are many studies of religious plurality which examine the theological questions in a largely theoretical, 'arm-chair' manner (e.g. D'Costa 1986, Wiles 1992, Race 1993), and many sociological analyses of religion in Britain which primarily analyse the survey material (Brierley 1991, Davie 1994, Bruce 1995). There are far fewer studies which begin with a practical situation in which a way of dealing with the fact of religious plurality has to be found. The inductive approach of a grounded theory offers a good chance of discovering whether or not teachers in the context of school collective worship are developing new understandings of the nature of religious belief as a result of their particular situation. As Strauss and Corbin (1990, 36) say concerning grounded theory, "the basic premise is that the research question should dictate the method . . . ."

Having given an overall description of the basic methodology and where it stands in the spectrum of social research, I now turn to a description of the early stages of the research.

THE EARLY STAGES OF THE RESEARCH

The early methodological issues

There were three main issues facing me at the outset: how much initial fieldwork and reading of the literature to do; selecting the sample of schools; and gaining access and cooperation.

The balance between the initial fieldwork and literature reading

In developing a grounded theory the researcher needs to get into the field at an early stage, before his ideas have been too firmly affected by his reading of the literature. As Strauss and Corbin say:

> You will come to the research situation with some background in the technical literature and it is important to acknowledge and use that, ... However, there is no need to review all of the literature beforehand (as is frequently done by researchers trained in other approaches), because if we are effective in our analysis, then new categories will emerge that neither we, nor anyone else, had thought about previously. We do not want to be so steeped in the literature as to be constrained and even stifled in terms of creative efforts by our knowledge of it! Since discovery is our purpose, we do not have beforehand knowledge of all the categories relevant to our theory. It is **only** after a category has emerged as pertinent that we might want to go back to the technical literature to determine if this category is there, and if so what other researchers have said about it. (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 50)

However, enough initial reading and fieldwork needs to be done to develop what Strauss and Corbin term "theoretical sensitivity", which they define as "the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to the data, the capacity to understand, and the capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't." (p.42). Theoretical sensitivity is a skill to acquire at an early stage and to be continued throughout the research. It is developed by constantly questioning the data and trying to examine it from all angles (p. 77).

The balance I struck was as follows. I conducted initial interviews (one per school) and observations (at least two per school depending on the complexity of the pattern of collective worship) in all the twelve sample schools between July and December 1994. Background reading of the literature was done throughout the period of the research (April 1994 - December 1998), with a preliminary literature review being written in June 1995 - i.e. after the initial interviews and observations. Significant amounts of reading were also done outside the main fieldwork periods, which were deliberately separated to allow for reflection and analysis to occur - in keeping with the grounded theory approach. The fieldwork dates were: July-December 1994 (initial interviews and observations); July

1995-March 1996 (seven pilot interviews); May-September 1996, November-December 1996, March-July 1997 (thirty seven main interviews conducted in three batches).

I also conducted nine other interviews with those who might be considered 'experts' in collective worship or have some important insights to offer. These occurred throughout the main research period (April 1994 - July 1997). They were with: the Bedfordshire RE Advisers (two: Miss Rachel Gregory - 21.2.94, Mrs Cath Large - 27.3.96); the Luton Spiritual and Multi-cultural Adviser (Mr Graham McFarlane - 8.1.98); the 'OFSTED' officer responsible for collective worship (Mr David Trainor - 4.9.95); the St.Albans Diocesan Schools Officer (Mr Richard Butcher - 19.5.94); the Director and Deputy Director of the National Society (Mr Alan Brown -15.5.95 & 3.7.97, Dr Alison Seaman - 17.10.94); the Chairman and Deputy Director of the Inter-Faith Network (Mr Brian Pearce, Dr Harriet Crabtree - 3.4.96); the Chief Executive of the then Schools' Curriculum Assessment Authority (Dr Nicholas Tate - 3.10.96).

All of these interviews, together with the initial interviews and observations in schools were designed to raise my level of awareness of the issues surrounding collective worship in such a manner as to ensure I had acquired 'theoretical sensitivity' without closing my mind to the ideas and categories which might emerge from the main data..

Selecting the sample

The first question in choosing a sample was whether or not it was to be a 'random sample' - i.e. one in which "each member of the population under study has an equal chance of being selected." (Cohen and Manion 1994, 87). The practicalities of conducting the research meant that all the schools in my sample were within the town of Luton and I considered this to be my 'population under study'. Such an assumption immediately limited the conclusions which could then be drawn about schools in other parts of Britain as it would have to be established that the situation in Luton is sufficiently similar to elsewhere for any such wider conclusions to be drawn.

The next issue was the extent to which my sample was representative of all Luton schools. Luton has 12 'Upper' schools (11-16), of which one is voluntary aided (R.C. and 11-18); 32 'Junior' schools (7-11), of which five are voluntary aided (four R.C., and one C. of E.); 6 'Primary' schools (5-11); and 32 'Infant' schools (5-7), of which three are voluntary aided (R.C.). Out of this 'population' a sample had to be chosen which was large enough to enable some comparisons to be made, and which was as near as possible to a random sample to enable general conclusions to be drawn.

The sample was constructed by asking the Chief Education Officer for Bedfordshire for a list of schools which would be representative of Luton. (Using the Chief Education Officer in this way had the additional advantage of making my initial access to the schools somewhat easier as I could say that the school had been suggested by him.) However, even his judgement may have contained hidden biases, especially as he knew the reason for my request. In practice, also, my relationship with some schools was affected by the fact that I already knew some of the teachers. All that can reasonably be said is that the sample chosen was representative of Luton schools in the sense that, between them, they reflected the ethnic origin and religious mix of Luton which is very varied. The 1991 census gives the main ethnic groups in Luton as follows:

White.....137,665.....80.20%

(N.B. This figure includes 9,266 Irish....5.4%)

Pakistani.....10,657.....6.21%

Indian.....7,205.....4.2%

Black Caribbean.....6,238.....3.63%

Bangladeshi.....4,679.....2.73%

This mixture is present in the local schools in varying degrees. Some are almost completely Muslim (99%), some have significant proportions (20-50%) from ethnic minorities (mostly Muslim, but a considerable number of Hindus), and some are largely

'White' and nominally 'Christian'. The Muslim population of Luton is mostly concentrated in certain areas of the town (mainly the 'Bury Park' area). Some of the schools in this area have a SACRE 'determination' releasing them from the requirement that the majority of the acts of collective worship should be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.'

The sample was made up of four high schools of which one was RC voluntary aided, and one had a SACRE determination; one primary school; five junior schools of which one was voluntary aided (Anglican), and two had SACRE determinations; and two infant schools. Further details of the sample are given in appendix one.

Two church schools were included to see whether or not there were any significant differences in the understanding of religious belief which underlies their acts of collective worship when compared with the county schools.

Three schools in the sample have a SACRE determination with the predominant reason being that it is mainly Muslim children who attend. These have been included because they represent a significant part of the school population in Luton, and it also enabled comparisons to be made with those schools which did not have such a determination.

I chose to include schools which span the compulsory school age range to enable comparisons to be made between the different age groups. In particular it may be that age and intellectual and spiritual development have some bearing on the way religious belief is portrayed in the acts of collective worship. There is a pedagogical issue concerning the appropriateness of dealing with such ideas as conflicting truth claims at particular stages of a child's development. In addition, the 1988 Education Reform Act specifically requires acts of collective worship to take into account "the family backgrounds, ages and aptitudes" of the pupils concerned. [Section 7,(4)c and 5. Also see 1993 Education Act, section 138, 5 (c) and 6.]

Given the nature of the sample it is clear that care will have to be taken when drawing any general conclusions about Luton, and extreme care in drawing any wider conclusions.

Gaining access and co-operation: the initial approach

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, 54) point out that:

> The problem of obtaining access to the data one needs looms large in ethnography. It is often at its most acute in initial negotiations to enter a setting and during the 'first days in the field'; but the problem persists, to one degree or another, throughout the data collection process.

I needed to gain the confidence and co-operation of both the headteacher and the other members of staff in order to be able to stand any chance of acquiring a good understanding of their perspectives. In all cases the initial approach was by letter to the headteacher (see appendix two), and this was followed up by an initial interview with either the head or senior teacher responsible for collective worship. The aims of this initial interview were twofold: to establish a good working relationship with the school and to give myself a preliminary understanding of the school and its approach to collective worship.

Establishing a good working relationship with the school was fundamental to the success of the research. There were several important aspects of this process. Firstly, I needed to emphasise that my main purpose was to try to understand the school's perspective and to elucidate the principles upon which they were working. They may well have thought that I had other hidden agendas behind my work. I wanted to allay any possible fears that my aim might have been to show that the schools were not complying with the law and that they should be more overtly christian in their approach. (The schools all knew that I was a local Anglican clergyman.) Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, 78) say, "From a variety of different contexts researchers report hosts' suspicions and expectations often proving barriers to access." (See also May 1993, 118-120).

Secondly, the schools were all what Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, 63-64) term "formal organisations" in which "initial access negotiations may be focused on official permission that can legitimately be granted or witheld by key personnel." In social research terminology such people are often called "gatekeepers" and they have a very significant effect on what can be done. As Hammersley and Atkinson (p.75) point out, "Even the most friendly and co-operative of gatekeepers . . . will shape the conduct and development of the research." In particular, I needed to be aware that the gatekeepers (headteachers or senior teachers in my case) would be concerned about the nature of the impressions which I gained of their school and might, therefore, make some attempt to control these impressions by, for example, choosing the better teachers for me to interview. (My ways of reducing this and related problems will be looked at below). As Hammersley and Atkinson (p.66) say:

> Whether or not they grant entry to the setting, gatekeepers will generally, and understandably, be concerned as to the picture of the organization or community that the ethnographer will paint, and they will have practical interests in seeing themselves and their colleagues presented in a favourable light. At least, they will wish to safeguard what they perceive as their legitimate interests. Gatekeepers may therefore attempt to exercise some degree of surveillance and control, either by blocking off certain lines of inquiry or by shepherding the fieldworker in one direction or another.

The initial interviews, as well as building a good working relationship with the schools were also designed to give me a preliminary understanding of how they worked. Bernard (1994, 147) speaks of the importance of building "explicit awareness" of the context and, in particular, of the little details which are often significant and can easily be missed.

These initial interviews were all audio-taped and a few notes were taken at the time which were expanded as soon as possible afterwards using a different colour pen to differentiate between notes taken at the interview and notes made later. An initial interview sheet (see appendix three) was used to provide a basic structure, but this was not followed slavishly because one of the main purposes was to establish a good rapport and, therefore, a degree of informality and flexibility was necessary. It was also extremely important to allow

interviewees to develop their own lines of thought rather than being controlled by my agenda and questions.

The questions used were either fact-gathering (e.g. the ethnic mix of the school, description of the pattern of worship), or open-ended (e.g. "Are there any particular issues or problems which affect the school's approach to collective worship?"). A description of the results of the initial interviews can be found in appendix four. These indicated a number of 'live issues' for the schools and there was a high degree of convergence as to what those issues were. This gave me a very sound basis for developing both my observation and interview schedules.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

There were four principal methods: participant observation, interviews with those who lead and plan collective worship, a questionnaire to the teachers who were interviewed, and examining the documentary evidence which surrounds collective worship in the sample schools. Each of these will now be looked at in turn.

Participant observation

This involved trying to see the acts of worship through the eyes of those who lead them. How did they interpret and understand what they were doing? In Weber's terminology this is the method of 'verstehen' which is

> the attempt to comprehend social action through a kind of empathetic liaison with the actor on the part of the observer. The strategy is for the investigator to try to identify with the actor and his motives and to view the course of action through the actor's eyes rather than his own. (Parkin, 1988, 19)

Some of the problems of this method will be discussed below.

The first major issue was how to choose teachers to observe and interview. In the initial observations and interviews it quickly became clear that those who led the acts of collective worship in the sample of schools were a minority of teachers and not a random

sample of all teachers. They tended to be either fairly senior in position or have some religious belief themselves. In effect, the process of choosing which teachers to interview was more akin to finding *"key informants"* - i.e. those who have specialised knowledge or experience of the area of concern. As Bernard (1994, 96) says, "Choosing key informants in field-work is a kind of critical case sampling. It would be pointless to select a handful of people randomly from a population and try to turn them into trusted key informants." He adds later on:

> An important question for ethnography . . . is: Are a few informants really capable of providing adequate information about a culture? The answer is: Yes, but it depends on two things: choosing good informants and asking them things they know about. In other words we must select informants for their competence rather than just for their representativeness. . . .
> . . . Good informants are people who you can talk to easily, who understand the information you need, and are glad to give it to you or get it for you. (pp.165-166)

In practice my research looked at the views of those who actually led collective worship - they were both knowledgeable and ready to talk. They were not necessarily representative of all the teachers in the schools: indeed, it is unlikely that this was the case.

The views of all the teachers in a school were more likely to have been represented in the written school policy on collective worship (if there was one), as these were usually drafted by one or two teachers, but then agreed by the whole staff. Unfortunately, as we shall see, this meant that the written policy documents were rather bland and general, only giving a partial insight into the issues. One of the aspects of the analysis stages of the research was to compare the documentary evidence with the data from the observations and the interviews: a kind of triangulation process.

Those whom I interviewed were effectively chosen for me by the *"gatekeeper"* who was either the headteacher, or the teacher in charge of collective worship. Thus the process of selecting whom to interview was akin to "snowball sampling," where as Bernard (1994, 96) puts it "you locate one or more key individuals and ask them to name others who would be likely candidates for your research." The sample of teachers was further biased

by the fact that they had to agree to be observed and interviewed, which tended to mean that I was looking at the more confident and competent ones.

However, these biases are not necessarily disastrous. Dean et al. (1967, quoted in Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 137) suggested choosing informants who are "especially sensitive to the area of concern" or who are more willing to reveal the information. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, 137) argue that it is not always necessary to have a sample which is representative of the whole population. It may be better "to target those people who have the knowledge desired and who may be willing to divulge it . . . ."

All of my 'gatekeepers' were asked in a brief questionnaire, "How and why did you choose the teachers whom I interviewed?" This was done in February 1998, some months after the main field work was completed. (Details are in appendix eleven.) Eleven out of twelve replies were received. In six out of eight infant and junior schools they were chosen because they were the regular, experienced leaders of collective worship and were willing to be interviewed. In the other two schools the teachers interviewed were those who happened to be on the assembly rota on that day. In the three out of four replies received from the high schools, seven out of nine teachers interviewed were chosen for their experience and willingness to be interviewed. Of the remaining two, one was chosen as a willing younger teacher, and the other was chosen for the same reason plus the fact that he was a Muslim and would bring a different perspective. Overall those interviewed were the experienced leaders of collective worship, with a few younger teachers as well. This meant that I could be confident that I had interviewed the "key informants" to use Bernard's phrase, whilst also having a fair cross-section.

There was also an important difference between the infant and junior schools on the one hand, and the high schools on the other: in the infant and junior schools I interviewed most of those who regularly led collective worship; in the high schools those interviewed

were a smaller proportion of all involved. This means that drawing general conclusions has to be treated with more care for the high schools.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) say that the development of a grounded theory requires "*theoretical sampling*", that is

> the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next, and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory. (p.45)
>
> The basic question in theoretical sampling . . . is: what group or subgroups does one turn to next in data collection? And for what theoretical purpose? (p.47)

Strauss and Corbin (1990, 176) say, more simply, that theoretical sampling is "sampling on the basis of concepts of proven relevance to the evolving theory." My sampling procedure could only approximate to this process because the "gatekeepers" in each school had arranged whom I interviewed. I did constantly stress to them that I wanted to see a typical cross-section because the initial interviews and observations had revealed a number of strong themes which occurred across most of the schools and were of wide concern amongst teachers - i.e. there was no obvious reason to look for particular categories of teachers.

Another very important aspect of 'theoretical sampling' is *'theoretical saturation'* which Glaser and Strauss (1967, 61) describe as follows:

> The criterion for judging when to stop sampling the different groups pertinent to a category is the category's theoretical saturation. Saturation means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category. As he sees similar instances over and over again the researcher becomes empirically confident that the category is saturated.

As the interviewing progressed it quickly became clear that not only were the categories saturated, but also new categories were no longer emerging with new interviews. There were only two partial exceptions to this general rule: the Muslim teacher and the Catholic teachers who tended to have different perspectives to the rest. Generally speaking

though, the data was firmly saturated - a sign that the sampling was suffficient to produce a grounded theory.

Overall, however, given the nature of the sample, great care needed to be taken in drawing any general conclusions.

Reducing the influence of the observer's own perspective in the observation process

A major aim of the research was to try to see things through the eyes of those directly responsible for collective worship. This required an awareness of my own interpretive framework and the perspective and values which I brought into the situation. I came with no particular view concerning the appropriateness of collective worship in schools, merely a belief that it was a very interesting and complex area. I also came with certain personal views about the nature of the 'truth' of religious belief which could be put into the 'critical realist' category. (See, for example, Hart 1995). As far as possible I tried to suspend my own judgements and to immerse myself in the school's world to gain an understanding of their categories and viewpoints. Bernard (1994, 149) speaks of 'maintaining naivete' - "This may mean working hard at suspending judgement about some things." Berger and Kellner (1981, 69) comment, "The act of interpretation necessarily involves a specific detachment. This includes a 'bracketting' of the interpreter's own standpoint." However, a complete "bracketting" is never possible. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, 103) point out, "In researching settings that are more familiar, it can be much more difficult to suspend one's preconceptions; whether these derive from social science or from everyday knowledge." They comment (p.18) that

> research is an active process, in which accounts of the world are produced through selective observation and theoretical interpretation of what is seen . . . . However, to say that our findings, and even our data, are constructed does not automatically imply that they do not or cannot represent social phenomena. . . .
> . . . rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate the effects of the researcher completely, we should set about understanding them . . .

They recommend (p.17) a "reflexive" process in which the researcher participates in the social world and then reflects on the products of that participation. Jorgensen (1989,

cited in Bernard 1994, 153) argues that the researcher must be able to switch back and forth between the insider's view and that of an analyst. My observations of the acts of collective worship required precisely that ability.

Initially, however, the aim was to immerse myself as far as possible in the world which I was observing: in Berger and Kellner's terms to "bracket" my own standpoint (1981, 69). But it had to be asked how realistic such a process was likely to be. As Parkin (1988) says, one of the criticisms of the method of 'verstehen' is that

> in order to understand the actor's conduct by way of empathy, it is necessary that the observer should be on roughly the same normative and moral wavelength as the actor. If they have widely divergent outlooks or incompatible beliefs the empathetic connection cannot be fully made. (Parkin, 1988, 22)

In the case of this study the fact that I am a trained teacher with five years teaching experience should mean that this problem is reduced. But even if there is a common cultural and professional background between actor and observer there is still "the nagging question that haunts all attempts to adopt a *Verstehen* procedure . . . How can I be sure that I have in fact grasped and understood the subjective state of the actor? How could I know if I had *mis*understood?" (Parkin 1988, 25). How could I be sure that I was not simply imposing my own interpretation, analysis and preconceived ideas on to the situation being studied?

In order to reduce this bias two strategies were adopted. Firstly, my main interviews were always carried out following the observation of a particular act of collective worship so that my understanding of the act of collective worship could always be checked back against what the leader of that act said in the interview which followed - i.e comparing what teachers said with what they actually did in the 'natural setting' of the assembly. Secondly, several pilot observations were undertaken (at least two or three per school) in order to sensitise myself to the pertinent issues. All the pilot observations were audiotaped and notes were taken at the time and expanded as soon as possible afterwards.

Only in the light of this experience were the main observations done using categories and terms developed as a result of the pilot observation.

Reducing the influence of the observer's presence

May (1993, 117) identifies a spectrum of roles which can be adopted in observation. These range from the complete participant through the participant-as-observer and the observer-as-participant to the complete observer. (See also Robson 1993, 190). The role I adopted was in the middle of this spectrum. The influence of the observer's presence is another major possible source of bias which needed to be reduced as much as possible. The leader of the act of collective worship normally knew of my attendance prior to the occasion so there may well have been a tendency to prepare a little more thoroughly and to present a little more carefully than usual. They also knew that I was a clergyman and this could have aroused suspicion concerning the real agenda of my research. The children almost always noticed that I was there and often I was introduced as 'someone who is interested in assemblies'. Usually after an initial turning of heads in my direction, the interest in me rapidly subsided. In addition, several schools were keen to show me their 'show-piece' assemblies.

In order to reduce these sources of bias four strategies were adopted. Firstly, I built a question into the interview which specifically investigated the leader's perception of the influence of my presence. Secondly, when negotiating access, I repeatedly stressed that I needed to aquire a genuine picture of the whole pattern of the worship. Thirdly, I made a point of having a preliminary conversation before the assembly to explain the purpose of my research to the teacher concerned. Fourthly, I sat towards the back, wearing clothing which would be similar to that worn by the male teachers, in order to be as inconspicuous as possible - in a large gathering such as an assembly it was usually relatively easy to sit unobtrusively at the side near the back of the hall. It was important to be at the side so that I could see not only the teacher leading the assembly, but also something of the faces and reactions of the children: it was important to be towards the back so that the influence

of my presence was minimised. Most schools were quite used to having adult observers (e.g. trainee teachers, advisers etc.) and sometimes, especially in the high schools, my presence seemed to go almost unnoticed. Most of the participants in a large event such as an assembly are relatively passive - they sit and listen. So it was quite easy for me both to participate and to be a close observer because the demands of participation were low. As a result I could easily and unobtrusively take notes according to an observation schedule (see appendix five for details) at the time of the assembly. The assemblies were also audio-tape recorded to ensure I had accurate verbatim quotations.

What and how to record during the observations

The next major issue was what to record and how to observe. I needed to ensure that the information gathered was going to be of use in answering the research question, but was also not hopelessly compromised by my theoretical perspective. It needed to be "grounded" to use Glaser and Strauss's (1967) terminology. I decided that a tight observation schedule would be far too limiting and that I would miss potentially important information. Similarly, a totally unstructured observation would not give the right degree of focus. I adopted a *semi-structured approach* to the observations which allowed me to concentrate on particular aspects, but also gave freedom to take note of whatever seemed pertinent. This was in keeping with the style of the main interviews. Kirk and Miller (1986, 66) describe a 'discovery' phase in qualitative research as "the fact collecting field operation" which is "critically dependent on a plan of research action." They say that "the ethnographer who gathers without knowing what he or she wants (at the logical level) will find no happiness in the process." They emphasise, however, that within this "systematic . . . amassing of information . . . the field research has the opportunity to consider tangential issues of any order." (See Foster, in Sapsford and Jupp, 1996, 60-64 for a fuller account of structure in observation).

The major aim of the research was to discover the understanding of religious belief which underlies the practice of collective worship. However, 'understanding of religious belief'

is a complex concept which cannot be directly observed in an act of collective worship - hence there was a need to focus on those aspects of such acts which might be "*key indicators*" of the concept under investigation. As Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992, 151) say:

> Often, multiple indicators must be developed to represent abstract concepts. . . . . Indicators should not be selected arbitrarily. They are to be grounded in both the theory and the empirical world.

The initial interviews and the preliminary observations had frequently raised similar areas of concern for teachers in leading acts of collective worship (see appendix four). These led me to identify four 'key indicators' which were both grounded in my initial data and closely related to the basic research question. As Robson (1993, 200) says:

> Particular dimensions may loom large in some studies. Considering these dimensions in the light of the research questions . . . is likely to lead to a greater focusing of the questions.

These 'key indicators', which I made a particular focus for the participant observation, were: (1) the ***use of prayers*** (and moments of silent reflection) and the way these were introduced; (2) the ***use of hymns*** and, in particular, how they were introduced, whether or not certain types of hymn (e.g. those containing reference to Jesus) were avoided, and whether or not the words of traditional hymns had been adapted; (3) ***explicit or implicit references to religious belief*** made during the act of collective worship and the type of language used; and (4) ***the use made of 'Holy books'*** and the way such material was introduced.

In the analysis of the observation data it was helpful to produce an 'operational' definition to try to measure the key indicators in some way and to bring a greater degree of precision to the observation. All the indicators were put on a 1-5 Likert-type scale as detailed in appendix six. This approach was somewhat crude as a quantitative measure, but did reveal some interesting broad trends.

In addition to the particular foci provided by the key indicators, I needed an *open, narrative style of observation* which would reduce the possibility of imposing my own

framework on the situation and to allow me as far as possible to see the event through the eyes of the participants - i.e. the method of 'verstehen'. Thus, as well as noting the key indicators, I also recorded in a narrative style what happened and the timing. This was to provide as 'thick' a description as possible. Robson (1993, 200) speaks of developing "a detailed portrait using this descriptive approach. This is the initial STORY or NARRATIVE ACCOUNT based on the events with which you have been involved." Part of this description involved taking careful note of the layout of the school hall, the relative positions of the participants, and the general atmosphere and context of the assembly.

Care had to be taken in the writing up of my *field notes*. The majority were written at the time of the assembly, but some notes were added (in a different colour pen) - usually later the same day. These additional notes included some verbatim quotations which seemed of particular interest after they had been checked on the audio-tape. As Foster (1996, 84) points out "it is very important to record as much detail as possible about what was said, both verbally and non-verbally. The actual language used may provide key information about subjects' perspectives which can be followed up in interviews and conversations."

Of course care had to be taken to ensure that the very act of note-taking and recording did not unduly influence the activity being observed. As Foster (p.85) comments on his own research in a school, "The act of note-taking inevitably affected the teachers' perceptions of me. My conversations with them revealed that they saw me as more threatening, and as more of an evaluator and less of a colleague, because of this." A similar issue arose through the act of audio-tape recording. I tried to minimise this influence in two main ways. Firstly, by trying to be as unobtrusive as possible by sitting myself at the side near the back of the hall, and by placing the tape-recorder in position where the leader of the assembly would not really notice it. This was relatively easy in a large gathering such as an assembly. Secondly, by always trying to build up my relationship with the teachers concerned so that they had a degree of confidence and trust

in my approach. I took care to explain what I was doing, to ask permission to record, and to assure them of confidentiality in that any quotations would not be attributed directly.

(See May 1993, 122ff; Robson 1993, 203,212ff; Foster 1996, 81ff, 87; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 175-190; Kirk and Miller 1986, 54ff for further discussion of field notes.)

Reducing bias in the observations -summary

The general aim was to be aware of possible sources of bias, to reduce them if possible in the ways which have been described above, and then to take proper account of their effects in any analysis. As Bernard (1994, 152) comments:

> No human being can ever be completely objective . . . . We can, however, become aware of our experiences, our opinions, our values. We can hold our field observations up to a cold light and ask whether we've seen what we wanted to see, or what is really out there . . . . The goal . . . is for us to achieve objective - that is, accurate - knowledge by transcending our biases.

Reliability and Validity

The question of reliability and validity then arose. How could I be sure that my key indicators, firstly, were genuine indicators of the underlying concept 'understanding of religious belief' (i.e. the issue of validity - were my observations telling me what I thought they were telling me?) and, secondly, would yield similar results from school to school and from one observation to the next (i.e. the issue of reliability)? In order to maximise the validity and reliability of the observations the findings of the observation stage were checked against what the teachers actually said when interviewed. Specific questions on the key indicators were built into the interview to enable this comparison to be made (details of this are given in the section below on interviews). In addition, the observation findings were checked against the written material produced by the school (especially the collective worship policy, and the resource books commonly used). This latter check may not be as significant as the first check as teachers may, in practice, pay little attention to a written policy or book. Nevertheless, to compare ***what teachers actually do*** (as observed in assemblies) with ***what they say they do*** (as recorded in the

interviews) and with ***what their declared intentions are*** (as stated in the written policy), should provide some evidence concerning the reliability of the findings. If there should prove to be consistent themes running across all three methods of investigation for a single teacher, and across the teachers within one school, and across the teachers from several schools, then our confidence in the validity and reliability of the findings will increase. This is the technique of "triangulation", which Hammerley and Atkinson (1995, 230-231) define as "the checking of inferences drawn from one set of data sources by collecting data from others." They go on to say that "the validity of inferences between indicators and concepts" can be assessed by "examining data relating to the same concept from participant observation, interviewing, and documents."

The analysis of the observation data

Becker (cited by May 1993, 125-128) describes four stages in the analysis of observation data: selection and definition of concepts, problems and indices; a check on the frequency and distribution of phenomena; construction of social system models; withdrawal from the field and final analysis, looking especially for contradictions.

My analysis of the observations had two parts. Firstly, an initial analysis was carried out before I analysed any of the main interviews. This corresponds to the first and second of Becker's stages. This included some quantitative analysis of my 'key indicators'. Secondly, an analysis of the observations was done at a later stage using the codes derived from my main interview analysis. This corresponds to the third and fourth of Becker's stages and was used primarily as a confirmatory triangulatory tool for the main interview analysis.

The main interview

The aim of the interview was to gain information about the teacher's understanding of the act of collective worship and, in particular, their view (as expressed by the way in which they led the act) of the nature of religious belief, and especially its 'truth'.

What type of interview? A semi-structured approach

The first issue was how structured to make the interview. If it was completely informal with very little structure then it would have the advantage of allowing the informants to express what is important to them in their own terms. However, such an approach ran the real risk of gathering data which was so disparate as to be virtually useless for the purpose of drawing any significant comparisons and conclusions. On the other hand a rigid structure would make comparison of data much easier, but would probably lead to an imposition of my preconceived ideas, perceptions, categories and prejudices on to the data.

The most fruitful approach was likely to be a semi-structured interview. Bernard (1994, 209) says that such an interview "has much of the free-wheeling quality of unstructured interviewing . . . but is based on the use of an interview guide. This is a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order." He goes on to state (p.210) that, "The interviewer still maintains discretion to follow leads, but the interview guide is a clear set of instructions." McCracken (1988, 21ff.) endorses such an approach. He argues that, "Qualitative methods are most useful and powerful when they are used to discover how the respondent sees the world." He points out the dangers of capturing only the researcher's logic and categories if the interview schedule is too tight, and yet some schedule of questions and prompts is necessary if the researcher is to succeed in the process of analysis. Thus a delicate balance of order and freedom is needed. May (1993, 93) says of semi-structured interviews, "These types of interview . . . allow people to answer more on their own terms . . . but still provide a greater structure for comparability over the focused interview."

Constructing the interview schedule

McCracken (1988, 29ff) suggests a four step method of enquiry: firstly, a review of the analytic categories, involving a literature review; secondly, a review of cultural categories i.e. applying the researcher's thinking and experience; thirdly, discovery of cultural

categories - constructing and carrying out the interviews; and fourthly, discovery of analytic categories: i.e. analysing the results.

I essentially followed the first two steps of this method by conducting the initial interviews and pilot observations, and reading the relevant literature to gain an awareness of the issues. This enabled me to construct a *pilot interview schedule* details of which are in appendix seven.

It began with two very open questions to allow the interviewee the opportunity to speak about what was important to them without any prior input from me. The questions were then more specific. One question deliberately focused on the key indicators referred to above. I then returned to a more general question about the teacher's understanding of collective worship to provide a check for comments made earlier in the interview and to give an opportunity for the expression of further ideas which the process of the interview may have stimulated. This was followed by an attempt to focus very specifically on the teacher's view of competing truth claims.

Pilot interviews were conducted in five schools. The overall schedule worked very well apart from one crucial question on the teacher's attitude to conflicting truth claims between religions, "How do you cope with the competing truth claims of different religions?" Some teachers did not appear to grasp the point of the question. I decided to use a specific example of such conflicting claims - the Muslim and Christian attitudes to the Christmas story with regard to the status of Jesus as prophet in the former, and as God Incarnate in the latter. The pilot interview question above was then replaced with two questions each with a sharper practical focus: "How do you cope with the fact that a variety of religions and world-views are represented among pupils and staff at an act of collective worship?", and, "How would you handle an assembly on a subject where the major religions and world-views took different viewpoints - e.g. Christmas?" This

approach proved far more successful in the main interviews (see appendix eight for the main interview schedule).

The main interview - how it was carried out

Thirty seven main interviews were carried out with teachers who lead collective worship in the sample schools. Three main interviews were undertaken in each of the twelve schools in the sample, plus one extra one.

May (1993, 97) suggests that there are three necessary conditions for a successful interview. Firstly, ***accessibility*** - does the interviewee have access to the information the interviewer wants? This is the issue of informant competence. As all the teachers interviewed were directly involved in collective worship this seemed a fairly safe assumption, although they would inevitably vary considerably as to the amount they had thought about the underlying issues. Secondly, ***cognition*** - does the interviewee understand what is required of him or her? The amount of prior briefing the interviewee had received from the 'gatekeeper' varied, so I ensured that I explained the purpose of the interview (see below). Thirdly, ***motivation*** - "The interviewer must make the subjects feel that their participation and answers are valued, for their co-operation is essential for the conduct of the research." I was careful to do this.

The start of the interview involved me explaining its purpose - i.e. to explore the teacher's understanding of collective worship with particular reference to the assembly which had just taken place. It was crucial to build up trust, rapport and co-operation. I assured the interviewee that nothing would be attributed to them by name, and that schools would not be individually identified. This introduction was a crucial stage in the interview process. May (1993, 98) stresses the importance of "rapport," which according to Spradley (1979, 78) "means that a basic sense of trust has developed which allows for the free flow of information." McCracken (1988, 37) emphasises that the beginning stage of the interview must create a benign, accepting and interested approach on the part of the

interviewer. In order to help this along I also asked some simple factual questions about the teacher (e.g. how long they had been at the school, their position at the school, their level of involvement with collective worship).

Having carried out this introductory phase, I then asked permission to audiotape the interview, and to take notes, as it was vital to have the teacher's own words and not mine, or my paraphrase of what they said. This permission was never refused and most of the teachers seemed quite at ease with this.

The main, middle stage of the interview consisted of what McCracken calls "grand tour" questions which allow the interviewee plenty of scope to express their understandings in their own terms. These were supplemented with more focused questions designed to elicit their understanding of religious belief.

Some degree of ***probing*** was essential. As McCracken (1988, 23) comments, the beliefs of respondents are often assumptions and, "The investigator must help the respondent to recover his or her beliefs and actions from this taken-for-granted state." In addition, as May (1993, 98) points out, probing is often needed "for comparable and codeable answers."

Any analysis needs to take into account the influence of the manner of the interview. McCracken (1988, 26ff) points out the danger of "collaboration" whereby the interviewee gives the interviewer what he or she wants to hear. I did not maintain the traditional completely neutral and detached position because I considered that it would help the teacher to reflect more openly and honestly if I established an environment which saw both the interviewer and the interviewee as facing the same difficult issues. The experience of the initial interviews had suggested that this approach is very conducive to an open expression of views. Feminist critiques of interviewing methods have suggested that engagement rather that disengagement should be adopted because, "To expect

someone to reveal important and personal information without entering into a dialogue is untenable" (May 1993, 103). Obviously the danger in this approach was that my input might distort the teacher's views and the way they were expressed, so it was done in a tempered way with my input taking the form, in the main, of open questions, invitations to expand on a point just made (perhaps by reflecting back what has been said), and probes to investigate issues of particular importance to the study.

Beginning to analyse the data and developing the interview schedule

I began the process of analysis whilst the interviews were still being carried out. This is in accordance with the "grounded theory" approach of Glaser and Strauss. This involved an initial coding and the attempt to discover analytic categories by carefully examining the transcripts. This 'reflexive' process allowed for emerging hypotheses to be tested in later interviews with the addition of suitable questions or by focusing on areas of particular significance which may have been glossed over in earlier interviews.

Although the overall framework of the interview schedule was maintained throughout the interview period in order to facilitate comparisons between interviews, the schedule was developed during the period of the interviews (May 1996 - July 1997) as a result of the preliminary analysis of the emerging data. Probes were added to test emerging hypotheses and ideas. In particular, it became apparent at an early stage that individual teachers - their beliefs and ways of approaching assemblies - were highly significant. Therefore, in the later interviews more information about their backgrounds was collected. Information about this was also collected via a questionnaire which was given to all the teachers in the sample in the autumn term of 1997 (see below for further details). I was also concerned that the interview schedule was not delivering enough direct information about the teachers' views on the truth of religious belief which was central to the research question. Part of the early findings was that teachers tended to avoid making evaluative comments about religions and did not readily talk about the 'truth' of religious belief. To correct this a probe was added to the later interviews asking

the teachers how they approached this issue both personally and in the context of school assemblies, and I took care to explore this in depth in the interviews. In addition, a question about this was included in the teacher questionnnaire. A final extra probe was added to investigate the influence of the age of the children on the way the teachers tackled the question of the variety of religious beliefs. Several infant and junior school teachers had commented that they thought the question of the 'truth' of religious belief was not appropriate at this level, although they acknowledged that the children were aware of the differences and the conflicts between beliefs, albeit at a simple level.

The method of analysis of the interview data and its justification

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, 205) say:

> The analysis of data is not a distinct stage of the research. . . . This iterative process is central to the 'grounded theorizing' promoted by Glaser and Strauss, in which theory is developed out of data analysis, and subsequent data collection is guided strategically by the emergent theory . . . .

They summarise this by saying that there is a "dialectical interaction between data collection and data analyis." (p.205). Throughout the period of the main interviews I wrote regular *analytic memos* to ensure that some serious analysis was going on in conjunction with the data collection. The main interviews were deliberately done in three main batches: Summer term 1996 (ten), Autumn term 1996 (eleven), and the end of the Spring term plus the Summer term 1997 (sixteen). The gaps between the batches gave time for some analysis to be done before moving to the next round of interviews. Bernard (1994, 360) defines qualitative analysis as "the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain the existence of those patterns." He stresses the importance of switching between listening to the informants' views and perspectives and stepping back to analyse what is being said.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996, 3) point out that "there are many ways of analyzing qualitative data." Later (p.10) they say:

> What "analysis" actually means is complex and is contested by qualitative researchers. Tesch (1990) identifies several key characteristics of qualitative data

> analyis that can be viewed as commonalities of the analytical process. . . . Analysis is a cyclical process and a reflexive activity; the analytic process should be comprehensive and systematic but not rigid; data are segmented and divided into meaningful units, but connection to the whole is maintained; and data are organized according to a system derived from the data themselves.

One of the crucial aspects for developing a grounded theory is the balance held in the process of coding between allowing the categories genuinely to emerge from the data and generating categories which will really shed light on the research question. This is a fine balance to hold. Too much rigidity in the research question may impose unwarranted shape on the data. I had to allow that the data may mean that the research question needed to be revised. On the other hand, if I wandered without any purpose or direction in the data, then nothing in particular might emerge which would be of any help with the research question. The fact that some very strong themes emerged at an early stage (see below) suggests that these two dangers may not be as real in this study as they might be in others.

Several writers identify a *threefold pattern in analysis*. Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest that there are three linked sub-processes in data analysis - data reduction, data display, and verification. Dey (1993) talks about describing, classifying and connecting. Wolcott (1994) speaks of data analysis consisting of description, analysis, and interpretation. The method which I have used in my analysis reflects this threefold approach.

I began, on a first reading, with looking for key ideas or codes. At this stage I was not searching for over-arching or meta-codes. I went carefully through each transcript highlighting what seemed to be discrete ideas and giving them a label - usually by writing a name for this code in the wide margin on the transcript. This corresponds to the process which Strauss and Corbin (1990, 62) call "*open coding*" which they describe as "the part of the analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data." They suggest that every discrete incident, idea or event should be given a name. Similar phenomena can be given the same

name. This process generates a number of different categories into which the data can be put.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) stress that coding is not a mechanical process. Choices have to be made as to which categories will be most useful. The data can be read in several ways or approached from several angles. They say that codes are "heuristic devices" which allow "the data to be thought about in new and different ways." (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, 29).

I then tried to define and illustrate these categories more closely, to get some feel of their relative importance in the overall pattern of the interview, and to see how the categories compared across the interviews, and how they were inter-related. This corresponded to what Strauss and Corbin (1990) call "*axial coding*", which they define as "a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories." (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 96). At an early stage four strong themes emerged which seemed to pervade most of the interviews, to be rooted in the data and also to shed some light on the main research question.

In this analysis some counting was done to give an idea of the ***intensity and frequency of the main codes and their sub-codes***. I took as the unit for counting a single paragraph or single comment by a teacher. The reason for this is that some teachers were far more succinct than others. Some used a key word, say three or four times, in a single exchange, others expressed the same sentiment just as firmly only using the word or phrase once. I only counted situations where the teacher had used the key word or phrase themselves or expressed strong agreement with it when it occurred in a question from me. Any counting process in qualitative analysis needs to be approached with great caution. It is, at best, a very imprecise activity because teachers sometimes expressed a sentiment without using the key word which I had chosen for counting. In cases where the sentiment was clearly present despite the absence of the key word I included this in the

counting, but obviously this was a matter of the researcher's judgement. I have counted the occurrences of both the main codes and their sub-codes. The former is a more reliable source of information than the latter because the main codes are broader and I allowed various different expressions of them to be included. The sub-codes were more narrowly defined and it was easier for the teachers to be talking about one of them without using the words I was looking for - much was said implicitly. Despite these drawbacks the process of counting did yield some interesting and useful results which gave some broad indications rather than precise measurements.

As the interviews progressed it became increasingly clear that the data was '***saturated***' in that fresh interviews were rarely producing new codes. Of course, I had to be aware of the possibility that I was reading my later interviews in a way that was biased to my four main emerging codes, but there was little room for doubt that the data was indeed saturated.

During the analytic process I also sought the feedback of the teachers interviewed. This is described in the next section. Generally speaking, they were strongly affirming of the main themes which I had identified as giving an accurate description of their situation. Having received this feedback, I then proceeded to another reading of the interviews using my four main themes with various sub-codes which will be described in the results chapters (4-7) below. In this third reading I also focused on: exceptions, discrepancies and oddities - things which did not seem to fit the emerging pattern; striking or unusual phrases, especially metaphors; and phrases or comments which seemed to summarise a major common theme very well. LeCompte and Preissle (1993, 274) comment that looking at the use of metaphor, simile and analogy can "facilitate the creation of catchy titles for ethnographies" and can provide "powerful ways to create linkages between seemingly unrelated topics." (See also Coffey and Atkinson 1996, 83-89).

The final stage of the analysis involved what Strauss and Corbin call "*selective coding*", which they define as:

> The process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development. (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 116)

The 'core category' is defined as "the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated." (p.116). Each of the four major themes had important consequences for the understanding of religious belief which underlies the practice of collective worship. From these consequences a 'core category' was developed which sought to capture the essence of this understanding. This was then related back to the four main themes in the data and to the wider theoretical frameworks (theological, philosophical and educational) to build a more complete analysis (see LeCompte and Priessle 1993, 264-278). This process will be described more fully in the remaining chapters, and especially in chapter eight.

The teacher questionnaire

The third method of data collection was a questionnaire sent in September 1997 to all the teachers whom I had interviewed. This questionnaire had two purposes: to get the teachers' feedback on my emerging ideas (i.e a form of 'respondent validation'), and to acquire some additional information, particularly with regard to their own personal and professional backgrounds and also their attitudes to the 'truth' of religious beliefs. The questionnaire was accompanied by an 'Interim Summary' of my ideas. Both were 'piloted' using two of my gatekeepers prior to being sent to all the teachers in the sample. (See appendix nine for the questionnaire and appendix ten for the Interim Summary).

Respondent validation can be used as a means of checking the researcher's reading of the data. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, 228) say of this device, "Some ethnographers have argued that a crucial test for their accounts is whether the actors whose beliefs and behaviour they are describing recognize the validity of those accounts." They warn that this notion has "an uncertain and sometimes contested place in ethnographic analysis"

(pp227-229) as "we cannot assume that anyone is a privileged commentator on his or her own actions, in the sense that the truth of their account is guaranteed." They may have various biases and "it may in a person's interests to misinterpret or misdescribe his or her own actions, or to counter the interpretations of the ethnographer." (p.229). Given these difficulties the description of this process as "validation" probably claims too much for it, but, nevertheless it is a useful source of additional data. Furthermore, Glaser and Strauss (1967) say that a grounded theory should be "readily understandable by laymen concerned" (p.237) in the area of study, and their understanding of it "tends to engender a readiness to use it, for it sharpens their sensitivity to the problems they face and gives them an image of how they can potentially make matters better, either through their own efforts or those of a sociologist." (p.240). Given the readiness of the schools to take part in this research because they saw collective worship a problematic area, it seemed likely that the feedback from the teachers interviewed would be a useful exercise.

Accordingly an 'Interim Summary' was produced at the beginning of the Autumn Term 1997 (after all the main interviews had been done) which described the four main themes which had occurred in the interviews. This summary was circulated round all the teachers interviewed, together with a brief teacher questionnaire which asked, among other things, for their comments on the emerging themes. Twenty eight replies (out of thirty seven) were received and there was a high degree of agreement that the four themes suggested gave an accurate overview (in the opinion of the teachers) of the views expressed in their interviews. The following comments were typical: "seem to coincide directly with the situation here", "I agree with all the comments made", "very true", "a very fair summary". Some qualifying comments were also made, but the overwhelming strength of opinion was that the four themes reflected the teachers' views very well.

The documentary data

The fourth source of data was the rich variety of documentation which surrounds acts of collective worship. This includes documents from: government and government-related

bodies such as OFSTED and QCA, local authorities and their SACREs, teachers' and professional organisations, churches and other faith-communities, and the individual schools. A full list is given in appendix twelve.

Between them these documents give a valuable insight into the current situation concerning collective worship. They were systematically collected throughout the period of the research (April 1994 - December 1998). Indeed, there was a constant production of them by the bodies concerned. Keeping up to date was a considerable task.

Jupp (1996, 303) cites Scott's typology of documents which is based on two main criteria: ***authorship and access***. Authorship refers to the origins of the documents. This can range from personal and individual through to bureaucratic and official. Access refers to the availability of the documents and ranges from closed (available only to a few insiders), through restricted (available on occasion with permission) to open (available to all). The documents I considered come towards the open and official end of the spectrum. School policies and OFSTED reports are the furthest in this direction: rotas, lists of assembly themes, and SACRE determination applications are less freely available, but are hardly at the personal or closed end of Scott's typology. Mason (1996, 78) stresses the need for "informed consent" in the use of documents. As most of the documents would be freely available to any interested party there were few ethical problems concerning privacy of documents. The schools were all willing to let me have their documents relating to collective worship.

Many of the documents were considered in chapter two, following Souper and Kay's division of the literature into the "official" debate and the "public" debate (Souper and Kay 1983, ii). My documentary analysis focused mainly on the individual school documents rather than the general documents. It also considered the official policy documents which form the background to collective worship - i.e. acts of parliament and government circulars, local authority and SACRE guidelines. This division has been made

because the main focus of my research is on the attitudes and views of the teachers who lead assemblies. The documents which are closest to them, and which, in some cases they helped to produce, were likely to be the most revealing for the purposes of my research. The government and local authority documents provided the general framework within which they operated, but were a secondary focus for my analysis.

The importance of the documentary data to this study

Finnegan (1996, 139) comments with regard to written documents:

> Some scholars would go so far as to regard them as *the* defining attribute of Western industrial culture, whether because of the (arguably) central role of print in our modern consciousness or through the development of modern bureaucracy with its reliance on written rules and administrative records . . . .

The production of school policies on almost every aspect of school life has been a notable feature of the educational world, especially since the 1988 Education Reform Act and the rise of OFSTED inspections. All the schools in my sample now have a written policy: few of them did at the outset of my research (April 1994).

These policies were likely to be revealing of the teachers' attitudes to collective worship, especially as in most cases they were discussed and approved by the staff of the school. In a discussion of critical discourse analysis (which includes the medium of documents) Jupp (1996) says:

> 'Discourse' encompasses ideas, statements or knowledge that are dominant at a particular time among particular sets of people . . . . Such knowledge, ideas and statements provide explanations of what is problematic . . . , why it is problematic, and what should be done about it. . . . discourse . . . can include ways of seeing, categorizing and reacting to the social world in everyday practices . . . . (p.300)
>
> Official documents provide valuable data for the analysis of official definitions of what is defined as problematic, what is viewed as the explanation of the problem, and what is deemed to be the preferred solution. (p.302)

School policies are official documents and were likely to yield interesting insights on what the teachers thought collectively and officially. This could then be usefully contrasted

with what they said in the more informal situation of the interviews, and with what they actually did in the assemblies.

Another advantage of these documents was that they were "primary sources", which Finnegan (1996, 141) defines as "those that were written (or otherwise came into being) by the people directly involved and at a time contemporary or near contemporary with the period being investigated." These primary sources are contrasted with "secondary sources" which "discuss the period studied, but are brought into being at some time after it, or otherwise somewhat removed from the actual events." (p.141).

The documents considered also have the advantage of being "unobtrusive measures." The key feature of this for my purposes is that, as Robson (1993, 272) comments, "The nature of the document is not affected by the fact that you are using it for the enquiry." Because the documents have not been produced for the research they can be described as "non-reactive" (p.272). With both the observations and the interviews there was always a degree of unavoidable bias due to my presence. My presence had no effect on these documents.

The way I approached the documents for the purposes of this study

These documents provided the official framework within which the schools were working. I needed to examine firstly, whether or not there was an 'official orthodoxy' either at government, local authority or school level (see Jupp 1996, 304ff); secondly, how influential these documents (school policies, local education authority guidelines, government legislation) were in the actual practice of collective worship in my schools' sample - did the teachers taken any notice of them? - and thirdly, whether or not the key themes identified in the main interviews were reflected in any way in these official documents.

The documents needed careful analysis but, as May (1993, 133) comments, documentary analysis is "one of the least explained research techniques." I made use of the documents in three ways: a preliminary survey to raise my awareness of themes and issues; a secondary source of data in a multi-method study; and, using insights from critical theory, to see if there was any dominant 'official' ideology surrounding the practice of collective worship which had any bearing on how the question of the 'truth' of religious belief was handled.

My preliminary survey reflected the view of Finnegan (1996, 138) who says that "the use of existing sources comes in at various stages in the research process . . . . One phase is that of the preliminary 'literature search.'" In this respect I looked through the documents at an early stage in the research and identified several major themes which seemed common to many of the school policies. This will be described in more detail in the results chapters 4-7. Robson (1993, 275) points out that "in many methodology texts this so-called 'fishing trip' is severely frowned on." The 'fishing trip' consists of "occasions when you have documents but no properly formulated notion of what you are looking for." In Robson's view "this prohibition on 'fishing' appears unnecessarily limiting", and he argues in favour of "the general spirit of 'exploratory data analysis.'" Such a view is firmly in keeping with the general approach of my work as a piece of grounded theory which seeks to derive ideas from the data rather than imposing a pre-conceived theoretical framework on to the data.

In addition to this initial survey, the documents were also analysed after the main interviews had been completed. This later documentary analysis was to confirm or otherwise the findings from the main interviews. In this respect it is being used in what Robson (p.274) describes as "*a secondary or supplementary method in a multi-method study*". Using multiple methods has several advantages (see Robson pp290-291) including: the reduction of inappropriate uncertainty if similar conclusions are reached in a number of different ways; allowing 'triangulation' or cross checking of conclusions from

different angles; allowing different, but complementary questions to be addressed within a single study; enhancing interpretability - i.e. making a phenomenon easier to understand by viewing it from several different directions.

Of course, as Mason (1996, 79) points out "a researcher must think strategically about the integration of multiple methods, rather than piecing them together in an *ad hoc* and eclectic way." Questions have to be asked about the appropriateness of combining different methods. Are they actually looking at the same phenomenon, or at different things? Mason (pp79-80) suggests some of the key questions are: "What can each method yield in relation to my research questions?"; "Which parts of the puzzle do they help me to address?"; "How do the different methods feed into each other?"; "How do they integrate logistically as well as intellectually?" The main factors in answering these questions are twofold. Firstly, the research question and, secondly, the basic methodology (a qualitative, interpretive approach seeking to develop a grounded theory).

My third approach to the documents came from *insights from the tradition of critical analysis.* Bearing in mind Robson's comment quoted above about multiple methods allowing complementary questions to be asked in a single study, several of the questions and approaches to documentary analysis suggested by Jupp (1996, 304ff), who writes from a perspective of critical analysis, were potentially very illuminating for my study. The key insights from the critical research tradition are as follows: firstly, the way in which documents are received and understood will depend, to some extent, on their social and institutional settings - we must enquire, for example, on whose behalf the report speaks and to whom it speaks; secondly, the concept of 'power' is a vital area for the analysis; thirdly, we must examine what is defined in the documents as problematic (and, by implication, what is not defined as problematic), the explanations and theories that are provided (and, by implication, the explanations and theories that are omitted or rejected), the solutions that are offered (and, by implication, the solutions that are rejected); and fourthly, we can ask whether there are 'ideal' positions that are produced in and through

such discourses, serving as powerful regulators, and why certain kinds of concepts, defined in certain ways, are placed on the public agenda, and how official documents frame the public agenda. (See Jupp pp304 -311).

The context and 'official' framework does affect how the teachers see their task of leading collective worship, both explicitly and implicitly. Governments have tended to use R.E. and collective worship both as a vehicle for moral education and to create a sense of national identity via the Christian heritage of this country, thus raising questions about the relative positions of the different faiths in the social and political structures of Britain, and the role of government in moral education.

In using these insights from the critical research tradition my aim is to see how the teachers' views are influenced by the official structures within which they are operating and to see whether or not this affects their understanding of the nature of religious belief and how this is handled in collective worship. This keeps the overall interpretive framework to my research whilst allowing useful insights from the critical research tradition.

How the documents were analysed

May (1993, 140) cites Scott's suggestion that the researcher should approach a document at three levels of meaning: the intended meaning of the author; the received meaning of the reader(s); the internal meaning which semioticians concentrate upon. I adopted two main strategies, which were to some extent inter-related. The first was to consider the context of the document and its intended and received effect. The second was to use the approach of content analysis and look for particular themes and categories within the documents.

The context of the documents, their intended and received effect

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, 173) suggest a list of critical questions to be asked of the documents:

> How are documents written? How are they read? Who writes them? Who reads them? For what purposes? On what occasions? With what outcomes? What is recorded? What is omitted? What does the writer seem to take for granted about the reader(s)? What do readers need to know in order to make sense of them?

This forms a basic list. Each document needs to be looked at in its own context. They are all social products. May (1993, 138) suggests:

> A researcher might . . . begin with an analysis of the common-sense procedures which came to formulate the document in the first instance, but their analysis need not end there. The document may be located within a wider social and political context. Researchers then examine the factors surrounding the *process* of its production, as well as the social *context*.

For example the process of production of an individual school policy may well affect its final content as they are often the product of only one or two people who happen to take an interest. Sometimes the fact that an OFSTED inspection was coming was the critical factor in the production.

A similar approach is adopted by Finnegan (1996, 144) who stresses the need to look at the process by which the document came into being, who was responsible for it, who the intended audience are, and what the purpose of the document is. (See also Robson 1993, 272-273, and Mason 1996, 75 and May 1993, 149-150). Finnegan (1996, pp146-149) produces a list of useful questions to ask of the documents. Of these three are particularly useful for my research:

Firstly, "*How far has the researcher taken account of any 'twisting' or selection of the facts in the sources used?* . . . Whatever form this takes there is bound to be some form of social filtering, possibly because they are produced by interested parties to suit their own views and preconceptions, dictated by particular administrative needs and arrangements, influenced by currently dominant models, theories or interpretations among scholars, and so on." (p.146). There may be, for example, a dominant 'multi-cultural' model or alternatively a dominant 'christian heritage' model of religious education.

Secondly, "*Is the source concerned with recommendations, ideals or what ought to be done?* . . . When it is a question of policy statements it is often hard to sort out just how far the statement is merely an empty ideal for propaganda purposes and how far a guiding principle for practice . . . ." (p.148). One principal aim of the documentary analysis was to compare the official position with what actually happened in practice as seen in my observations. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, 166-169) stress that in many situations documents are an integral part of the system of an institution. As such they should not be treated at 'face value', but seen as a 'social product'. May (1993, 138ff) points out that documents "do not simply reflect, but also construct social reality and versions of events." The researcher, therefore, searches for the documents' "meaning" : not taking them at face value, but exercising "suspicion."

Thirdly, "*How relevant is the context of the source?* . . . the particular crisis in which the author was involved, the political state of play, the nature of public opinion at the time - in fact, all the background factors which influence how both the author and the intended audience would understand the words in the context in which they were originally said or written." (Finnegan 1996, 148) Very often, for example, the prospect of an OFSTED inspection is the catalyst which generates a school policy on collective worship.

Content analysis

The second main method of documentary analysis which I used was content analysis. The overall approach of content analysis is to look for particular themes and categories, whilst taking into account all the questions raised above concerning the social context. May (1993, 145) describes it as considering

> the frequency with which certain words or particular phrases occur in the text as a way of identifying its characteristics. The resulting analytic framework then makes 'sense' of the data through generated theoretical categories.

Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992, 316) point to the importance of analysing the intensity and frequency of categories. May (1993, 147) cites Ericson, Baranek and Chan who describe the process of analysis as follows: "the analyst picks out what is relevant for

analysis and pieces it together to create tendencies, sequences, patterns and orders." Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992, 311) cite Holsti who defines content analysis as "any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of the message." They suggest that content analysis can be used to: identify the internal characteristics of the message; make inferences about the sender of the message and about the causes or antecedents of the message; to make inferences about the effects of the message on the recipients. (p.312ff). Hence the results of such a content analysis can be compared with the ideas generated by looking at the documents' contexts.

One particular question is which ***recording unit*** to use. (See Robson 1993, 276; Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias 1992, 314). This could be: individual words of particular significance; general themes which recur; or paragraphs. In this study it is the first two of these which are the most helpful. In this process a good deal of care is needed. Robson (p.277) says that categories need to be "operationalised" - i.e. "an explicit specification has to be made of what indicators one is looking for when making each and any of the categorizations." In any categorisation it is important not to lose sight of the context of the recording unit and the degree of inference which has been used in order to assign a unit to a particular category (Robson 1993, 276).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

My overall methodological framework is qualitative and interpretive, and aims to produce a 'grounded theory'. However, three cautionary comments need to be made.

Firstly, as Bryman and Burgess (1994, 5-6) point out, there are

> relatively few genuine cases of grounded theory . . . . Rarely is there a genuine interweaving of data collection and theorizing of the kind advocated by Glaser and Strauss. . . . As a result grounded theory is probably given lip-service to a greater degree than is appreciated. . . . and 'is widely adopted as an approving bumper sticker in qualitative studies'.

Secondly, the process of coding is not an exact science with precise methodological rules. Much depends on the researcher as to how it is done. Each individual piece of research needs to give its own justification for its procedures and conclusions.

Thirdly, there is no one simple method called 'grounded theorising'. Glaser and Strauss fell out with each other as to how their original ideas should be developed and produced some separate publications in the 1980s which contained very sharp disagreements.

Despite these cautionary words the overall qualitative, interpretive, 'grounded theory' approach gives the best framework for this study for the reasons explained in this chapter.

PART TWO

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 4

INCLUSIVITY - "THAT UNITY THING"

INTRODUCTION

This is the first of four chapters which describe, justify, and critically analyse the findings of the research. Each of these chapters is built around one of the four main themes which emerged from the study. The data was 'saturated' with all four of these themes as will become clear below.

In this chapter I shall begin with a general overview of the central theme of 'inclusivity' (or "that unity thing" as one teacher (J1.1.16) put it) and then present two important aspects of this theme. The first aspect is the tension between the desire to 'celebrate' the variety and diversity of faiths on the one hand and, on the other hand, the promotion of the 'Christian heritage' of Britain. The second aspect is the search for the social 'cement' which holds a school (and possibly wider society) together. This will be followed by a section on interesting exceptions and anomalies in the data. I shall conclude by drawing out the implications of these findings for the understanding of the nature of religious belief, and particularly its 'truth', that underlies this feature of the current practice of collective worship.

'INCLUSIVITY' - "THAT UNITY THING"

There was an extremely strong desire expressed in all the schools to keep the whole school together for assembly despite the manifold beliefs of pupils and staff. All the teachers interviewed wanted an occasion which could bind the whole school together and in which everyone could participate no matter what their beliefs or background. Words such as 'togetherness,' 'belonging,' and 'sharing' were used frequently to describe the experience of assembly. Several teachers referred to their school as a 'community' or, less frequently, as a 'family'. All the schools took genuine pride in their ability to draw everyone together. Often real disappointment was expressed when pupils were excluded

or withdrawn from assembly. The most usual case of this was with Jehovah's Witnesses' children. There was a genuine fear of fragmentation of the school. This very powerful desire for a sense of belonging and community stands in sharp contrast with the theme of the next chapter which stresses the importance of the individual - his integrity, freedom and choices.

The evidence in the data.

The interview data was 'saturated' with this theme. It is difficult to overstate the intensity and frequency of the comments about the need to bring the children together to develop a sense of belonging and the school as a community. Such comments occurred in all the interviews apart from two interesting exceptions, one being a Muslim teacher and the other being the Catholic school - these will be considered in a later section of this chapter.

In the twenty four main interviews with the infant and junior school teachers, twenty three of them spoke directly and frequently about the importance of everyone being together as a whole school. The remaining interview mentioned this aspect as significant, but it was not emphasised. Twelve of them used the word 'community' to describe their school, two used the word 'family', and ten spoke of the importance of a sense of 'belonging'. Very significantly, twenty two (nearly 92%) mentioned the ***fear of withdrawals*** despite the fact that there was no direct question on this in the interview schedule. The following comments are typical and illustrate ***the widespread desire for inclusivity*** across all the infant and junior schools: "it's a time when we belong to each other and I do try and have a flexible approach - to be inclusive rather than to exclude children" (I1.1.2); "It has to be multicultural, . . . you have to include all the children in what you are saying . . . you can't do it in a way that precludes some." (J2.2.6); "bringing the school together, and making the school, belonging to somewhere" (J4.1.1); "It is important for the children to come together, . . . you've got the feeling of the school as a community" (P1.1.1), "it's sharing an experience and it's the only thing they do in that vast cross-age thing" (P1.1.9).

Whilst the idea of the whole school as a community was there in the high school interviews, they also placed a considerable emphasis on belonging to a year group or tutor group. This was mainly due to the fact that it was impossible to get all the high school pupils assembled in one hall because of the relative sizes of school and hall: to some extent the practicalities dictated the degree to which it was possible to develop this much desired sense of belonging and community. Of thirteen main interviews with high school teachers, ten spoke of the importance of 'togetherness'; four used the word, 'community,' and one the word, 'family'. These themes are illustrated by the following comments which were typical of many from the high schools: "there is great value in bringing students together in large groups like that to do community things, school community acts" (H2.1.3); "there is still a need to bring groups together in a school situation to get the feeling of community within the school" (H2.1.7); "I very much like the idea of bringing pupils together . . . . It actually gives them a sense of belonging, it gives them a sense of identity within the year." (H3.3.2/3); "it gets us together as a year group, . . . it gives us a bit of a feeling of togetherness." (cH1.3.2).

The ***fear of withdrawals*** was not nearly so pronounced in the high schools as in the infant and junior schools. Only two interviewees mentioned this as a matter of concern. In practice the number of withdrawals was extremely small in all schools.

This desire for inclusivity also occurred frequently and strongly in all the infant and junior school policy documents. One such policy described collective worship as "a form of cement that binds the community together" (J2), and in another it was stated that "the governors expressed a strong wish for the school to remain united" (J1) - there was particular emphasis on keeping withdrawals to a minimum.

The desire for inclusivity was forcefully expressed in all the high school policy documents on collective worship. All wanted to create a sense of belonging. One school aimed to give assemblies "a community focus" (H3); another school prospectus spoke of the

schools as a "happy, energetic, and dedicated community" (H2). The word 'community' was used many times in the policies by all the schools to describe themselves. For example, one policy said the school wished to develop "a sense of community based on shared values" (H1). All wanted an inclusive, all-embracing approach, where everyone could participate regardless of belief. One school saw collective worship as an experience in which "all can contribute and from which all can gain, regardless of their personal beliefs or commitment" (H3). The Catholic high school had a distinctive emphasis describing the school as "a caring Catholic community". This was one of several ways in which it reflected the themes present in the county schools, but gave them a Christian slant.

The government and local authority documents all stressed the need for an activity in which the whole school could participate. The primary parliamentary legislation says that "all pupils in attendance at a maintained school shall on each school day take part in and act of collective worship" [1988 ERA section 6.(1)]. Circular 1/94 (DFE 1994, paragraph 65) states clearly that:

> Pupils who do not come from Christian families should be able to join in the daily act of collective worship even though this would, in the main, reflect the broad traditions of Christian belief. The law intends that, subject to the exceptions provided by section 9 of the 1988 Act (paragraph 83), all pupils will take part in such collective worship.

Two SCAA discussion papers on spiritual and moral development both speak of the importance of a school developing a sense of community (SCAA 1995a, 4; 1996, 11).

This inclusive emphasis is reiterated in the local authority documents. The Luton LEA document entitled 'Focus: Collective Worship' stresses the importance of "making the experience inclusive so that all pupils can feel part of it" (Luton MERC 1997, 16). The Bedfordshire Education Service booklet, 'Collective Worship', speaks of "the special opportunities offered by the multi-faith situation." Here there can be "assemblies which are an educational experience for all, and which focus on some facets of worship in which all can share." (Bedfordshire Education Service 1989, 24).

This emphasis in the documents on total participation is tempered with the recognition that there will be some pupils whose beliefs do not allow them to take part in collective worship. So the legislation provides the opportunity for withdrawal by individual pupils or teachers although it is clearly the intention that this should be kept to a minimum. Schools, on the whole, have been very successful in this as the OFSTED report on 'Religious Education and Collective Worship 1992-1993' indicated - "Few pupils were withdrawn from worship; the largest category were Jehovah's Witnesses." (OFSTED 1994a, paragraph 66).

Alongside the desire for all to participate, the view of a school as a community was very widespread, particularly in the local authority documents and the government discussion papers. For example: "Collective worship . . . provides a focus for the school community" (Bedfordshire Education Service 1989, 1); "At assembly the whole community shares . . . ." (ibid., p.14); "School collective worship can be an activity that . . . fosters a sense of fellowship and community" (Bedfordshire Education Service 1995, 1). Some other local authority guidelines reveal a very similar trend (e.g. Hertfordshire 1995; Suffolk 1995).

Of the fifty nine assemblies observed only two featured a direct comment on inclusivity. One high school head began the assembly by saying that it was good to be "together as a school community" (H1); and one teacher at the Catholic high school started off with "we are part of God's family" (cH1.3). This lack of direct comment (when compared with the frequency of comment in the interviews) is not surprising given that it is the activity of the assembly itself which unites the school - the very fact of gathering is a statement about the importance of the school community. There is no need for a verbal reinforcement.

There was, however, one feature of the observed assemblies which did give direct evidence for the desire for inclusivity - this was the use of songs and hymns. (This was one of my 'key indicators' which would give information about the way religious belief

was handled in this context). Singing only occurred in the infant and junior schools, but here there was a ***strong trend to using more general, non-religious hymns rather than specific Christian ones***, although the latter were still much in evidence. Of thirty five infant and junior assemblies observed, there were nineteen songs with a religious content and sixteen general songs. In the former category the schools tended to use only those songs which referred to God (rather than Jesus) as these were more widely acceptable. Some schools had a deliberate policy of altering hymns. One junior school (J3), which had mostly Muslim children, had gone through the hymn book and explicitly deleted all hymns which referred to Jesus Christ as God or Lord. This observation was reinforced by comments from the interviews - e.g. "there were certain hymns that weren't suitable . . . so we moved away from that . . . into the much more generic. . . . a lot more general hymns." (J3.1.4). There were several school who had done similar things. It was important to have hymns which everyone could join in and hence the 'general' hymns were more acceptable, as the following interview comments illustrate: "this morning when we had 'Praise Him,' again the 'Him' can refer to different children's gods." (J3.2.9); "I don't think we do sing, apart from Christmas, . . . any Jesus songs." (I2.3.8). This approach is in sharp contrast with the attitude in the 1950s, which assumed a Christian background to assemblies, expressed in a *TES* article: "There must . . . be an unequivocal policy about hymns. They must be chosen for their scriptural soundness - woolly invocations to nature worship are not suitable - and for their literary merit *as hymns*" (*TES* 17.12.54, 1175). However, not all schools were so particular as those who altered songs. A teacher from another junior school with a very mixed religious background (J2) said that they sang "generally Christian" (J2.3.9) songs and, as noted above, these were still very much in evidence in many of the schools.

Several teachers commented that the children sang hymns if they enjoyed the tune - almost regardless of the appropriateness of the words to children of different faiths. Most teachers seemed prepared to go along with this anomaly for the sake of the uniting influence of a good song. As one primary teacher said, "they are bouncing out the words

without even realising them . . . they thoroughly enjoy the singing." (P1.3.7). Another junior teacher commented, "I think the children haven't got a clue about the words. . . .it is singing at this level." (cJ1.1.9). A teacher at the church junior school was asked if there was any problem with children from non-Christian faiths singing Christian songs. She replied, "No, I don't think so at all. They all join in - if they enjoy singing!" (cJ1.4.9). This aspect of singing was recognized in the Schools' Council 'Working Paper Number 44' which said of singing:

> The intellectual meaning of many words and phrases will escape children in the primary school, but the corporate nature of the activity, the pleasure of making melody in rhythm, and the sharing of an experience which the adults evidently enjoy and regard as important, may bring enrichment to the lives of the children and contribute something to their all-round development. (Schools' Council 1972, 68)

Singing was a no-go area in high schools (apart from at the Catholic school masses, and even here it was hard going) as the following two comments reveal: "we don't have songs or hymns, we've never had since I've been here in ten years." (H 2.1.8); "we don't even start trying to make them sing. So they never have hymns." (H 3.3.5).

The implications of the desire for 'inclusivity'

Having considered the overwhelming evidence for the schools' desire for inclusivity, we now consider some of the implications of this. We must first turn to the seminal views of Durkheim (1972) on the role of both religion and education. He interpreted religion in a functionalist manner: it both united a society and provided a common moral base. His definition of religion saw it as a "unified system of beliefs and practices . . . which unite into a single moral community, called a 'church' all those who adhere to them." (p.224). With the decline in traditional institutional religion Durkheim believed that society would continue to need a functional equivalent which both united people and gave them a common moral base. He said:

> There is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself. There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and personality. Now this moral remaking cannot be achieved except by the means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals, being closely united to one

> another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments; hence come ceremonies which do not differ from regular religious ceremonies, either in their object, the results which they produce, or the processes to be employed to attain these results. (Durkheim 1915, 427)

He also argued that education had a crucial role in the moral formation of the young:

> Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the mind of the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that social life demands. . . . Education is thus simply the means by which society prepares, in its children, the essential conditions of its own existence. . . . Thus we reach the following conclusion: *Education is the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to stimulate and develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole, and by the particular milieu for which he is specifically destined. . .* (Durkheim 1972, 203-204)

Durkheim did not consider school rituals directly, but his views would seem to imply that these could have an important place to play in the unity of wider society.

There have been many articles written over a considerable period of time which speak directly of the importance of the school's unity and ethos. As long ago as 1967, the Plowden Report suggested that "the Act of Worship was of great value as a unifying force for the school" (Plowden 1967, para.570). Cockin (1968, 10) spoke of the "school community" and of the "agreement that the regular gathering together of its members has its own value as both a symbolic and an efficacious act." Bernstein et al. (1971, 160ff) in a discussion of ritual in education spoke of "consensual rituals" which "function so as to bind together all members of the school, staff and pupils as a moral community, as a distinct collectivity." These rituals "assist in the integration of the various goals of the school, within a coherent set of shared values . . . ." (p.160). They go on to make the important point that in the increasingly pluralistic environment of the early 1970s, "the response to the consensual rituals is likely to be weakened because of ambiguity in society's central value systems . . . ." (p.162). The 1944 Education Act had implicitly assumed that it was Christian beliefs and values which provided the uniting factor for the nation's schools (Souper and Kay 1983, 6&9). The wisdom of this was doubted at the time and has come under increasing criticism since then given the secular, multicultural

and postmodern trends in society. Even so, in the tumult of the 1960s Hogbin (1965, 21ff) could still argue, in an article entitled "The School as a Christian Community", that although "our cultural life is fragmented", yet "enough still remains of the tradition of the Western World for the school to remain in part at least, Christian at the ideological level. Something yet remains of a system of thought that has as its origin Christian thought." In the intervening period this claim of Hogbin's has become harder to maintain and the very real question which faced the teachers in my sample was ***how to fill the vacuum left by the diminishing influence of the Christian basis for the unity of the school.***

Might it be the case that today's 'unity' in schools and in wider society is a case of the 'Emperor's new clothes'? As we can see from the above evidence, there was an overwhelming expressed desire for inclusivity, but there was far less explanation of what the substance of the desired school unity should be. In part it was the search for 'shared values' and 'common ground', and the 'celebration of diversity' all of which we shall examine later. There were only a few direct clues in the data as to the substance of this unity. One of these clues was the use of ***metaphor of the body*** to describe the desired unity. A church junior school teacher said: "we are a corporate body, . . . we should suffer as a body, we should care for each other, . . . we try and move the whole school as a unity . . . ." (cJ1.1.2). This has overtones of the Christian understanding of the Church as the body of Christ (as in 1 Corinthians 12), but for this teacher the origin of this concept of the school was to be found in the more general idea of our common humanity and the duty to love God and neighbour that occurs in many religions and which she described as "a central faith of mankind" (cJ1.1.15). One of the county junior school teachers (J4.3) also used the metaphor of the school as one body. She employed it three times in the interview and spoke of "becoming one body, yes joining together and being as one." (J.4.3.9); "being one body, aiming for one goal." (J.4.3.2) The body metaphor has the implication of many different parts operating under an overall guiding influence and having an essential unity despite the variety of its constituent bits. But the question remains as to what the "one goal" might be. Here the teachers were much less clear.

In the high schools, as with the infant and junior schools, there was far more comment on the need for inclusivity than analysis of the meaning and substance of this much desired unity of the school. One teacher spoke of a "shared feeling", which gives inclusivity a very subjective slant; another spoke about "integrating the pupils and staff" without saying what this might mean; another suggested that the whole group might be "thinking the same thing." Given the widespread emphasis on the avoidance of indoctrination it is likely that she meant thinking about the same thing, rather than having identical thoughts. A word often used by the high school teachers was 'focus', but again what might constitute a focus for assembly was much less clear. Often it was simply the topic chosen by the teacher who led, or sometimes it was dictated by the school's 'theme for the week' which many used.

It seemed that ***the teachers were struggling to find the content of the much desired unity***. The word 'collective' illustrates the problem. They were all aware that those gathered for the assembly were often of many different faiths, views and cultural backgrounds. They were collected together for schooling, but what was it that really united them? And what place, if any, did religious belief have in this desired sense of unity? Of course, as indicated above, this desire for the unity of the school is nothing new and in part it derives from the need for the school institution to work together to achieve its educational goals, but the ***overwhelming nature of this desire in the teachers indicated that there was something more powerful and fundamental at work, which went beyond the school as an institution and into the nature of society itself***. Bernstein et al. (1971, 160) commented that "consensual rituals . . . facilitate appropriate sentiments towards the dominant value system of the wider society." There is a sense in which the school represents a microcosm of wider society and perhaps the desire for inclusivity was so strong in the schools because the teachers were aware of the need to find uniting factors in an increasingly diverse and fragmented society. The 1988 ERA spoke specifically of the schools' responsibility to prepare pupils "for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life." [1988 ERA, section 1.(2)(b)]. If the

children can be given a sense of what binds them together in school, despite all their different backgrounds and beliefs, then this might go with them into their adult lives. The task facing the teachers in my sample was how to give substance to the need for unity of both schools and society - no simple task in today's diverse culture. Hughes and Collins (1996, 3) speak of their concern to deal with this problem:

> Society is in desperate need of developing consensus and a sense of cohesion. . . . The authors hold the view that collective worship has an important part to play in this process, and that it is one of the ways in which schools can help to influence the nation's future for the better.

The Bishop of Lincoln summed the situation up, albeit in slightly nostalgic terms, as follows:

> A hundred years ago - even sixty years ago - schools knew where they stood. Church, home and school shared the same values and said substantially the same things to the young. There was broad general agreement about both family values and community values. . . . Today this is no longer the case, and schools find themselves without a map to help them through the shifting sands of morality and behaviour. (Foreword to Douglas 1995, 2).

THE TENSION BETWEEN THE CELEBRATION OF DIVERSITY AND 'CHRISTIAN HERITAGE'

One of the main reasons it was so difficult for teachers to identify the substance of the 'inclusivity' which they so desired in the school community was the real tension between the trend towards a genuinely plural, multicultural and postmodern society on the one hand and, on the other hand, the desire of many to reinforce British national identity by giving the Christian faith a privileged position (a tension which is reflected in the 1988 Education Reform Act). The first, and perhaps the most obvious, tactic which the teachers adopted in order to achieve the much desired inclusivity was to ***celebrate the diversity of beliefs*** which involved valuing them all equally, and treating them all as 'equally valid', and also a very deliberate attempt to promote attitudes of respect, tolerance and mutual understanding between different beliefs. In some schools, and for some individual teachers, this was tempered with an emphasis on learning the ***cultural***

heritage of this country. This section examines the evidence for, and the implications of, this tension.

Celebrating diversity

There was plenty of evidence in the data to indicate that some schools make a very ***deliberate and positive attempt at celebrating the diversity of faiths***. One infant school (I1) went so far as to describe itself as "a community school in celebration". The headteacher described the approach with great enthusiasm and passion:

> In our school community we are all very different and that's wonderful . . . we have Jewish children, we have Hindu children, we have Muslim children, we have Jehovah's Witness children, Roman Catholic children, Anglican children, that is wonderful. And every child, you must be very proud of who you are and what your family believes in and . . . what your family practises and in your family's traditions. I am very proud of my family traditions, but I am very interested in yours - and that's the sort of ethos we want to promote. (I1.1.2)

The whole thrust in this school was on the celebration of the diversity of beliefs and cultures and the question of making any evaluative comments (especially concerning the 'truth' or otherwise of any beliefs) was firmly sidelined. In a junior school which also took particular pride in the celebration of festivals from different faiths, the teacher who was mainly responsible for collective worship said:

> We come together as a school, we come together with vastly different experiences, different cultures, different faiths in many ways, but we try and come together, we try to be collective, we try to be one school, one unified school, and the act should be a cement that binds us together or celebrates each other's diversities and colours the lives of us all. (J 2.1.11)

A teacher from the Catholic high school, where one might expect less emphasis on the celebration of diversity, made a particularly interesting comment:

> I . . . encourage pupils to take a very positive view of difference, to see it as one of the greatest things we have, this is part of God's greatest creativity that He should create such differences among people . . . . we should see them as something to be really enjoyed, to be curious about, to be interested in, and to enjoy, and to be able to celebrate somebody else's difference rather that see it as an endless problem. (cH1.2.12)

Both this teacher and the junior school teacher mentioned above had lived in different countries and this seemed to have been a major influence on their positive approaches to religious and cultural diversity.

The positive celebration of diversity was also underlined by all the schools strongly emphasising the promotion of attitudes of ***respect, tolerance and mutual understanding between different beliefs***, as the following comments show: "We are trying to bring that [regard and respect of other people] through with observance of other festivals, the way we treat other people of other religions within the school community. . . . you're looking at tolerance and some respect." J3.2.12-13); "I think it's the word 'respect' which is probably the key to most of what I do." (J3.1.3); "the tolerance and understanding message we are trying to get through" (H2.1.12).

Most of the school policies spoke of celebrating the diversity of beliefs and cultures. One high school said, "Assemblies will be used to celebrate the main festivals of world religions." (H1) All of them wanted to promote attitudes of "respect, tolerance and understanding." Another high school policy spoke of "respecting the variety of cultures and traditions represented within the community" (H3). The church junior school described their aim "to encourage respect for moral and spiritual values . . . tolerance towards other races, religions and ways different from their own."

However, the overall picture of the celebration of diversity was more nuanced than a simple positive approach. My evidence suggested that although some schools and teachers undertook an emphatic celebration of diversity and most were in genuine sympathy with this approach, it was still not as strong as ***the more negative desire to avoid division and offence by making evaluative comments***. Only seven out of twenty four infant and junior school teachers mentioned celebrating diversity as a significant theme and only two teachers made a point of emphatically stressing this, although many adopted this approach implicitly. ***Caution***, however, was a major factor. One teacher,

when asked whether or not he would make any kind of evaluative comment between the different conflicting views, answered with a firm, "no" (H 1.2.16). Another high school teacher said, "we do tread carefully [concerning other people's beliefs] and not criticise" (H2.1.12). Many others took a similar line, and most were very cautious in this area of evaluation of beliefs - either explicit or implicit. ***Fear of causing fragmentation*** was the main reason given for this wariness of making any evaluative comments about religious beliefs. Most felt this would be out of place in an assembly and would be divisive. One junior teacher commented, "if we are not careful we will have various groups withdrawing" (J2.2.2). One junior school headteacher said, "I tend to leave Easter" because "there are too many conflicts between the two faiths [Christianity and Islam] on that one. . . . If worship in school means anything it's got to be consensus, hasn't it?" (J1.1.13).

The influence of 'Christian heritage'

Another very important factor in the schools' approach to the diversity of faiths was the attitude to the 'Christian heritage' of this country - and the tension between this and the desire to celebrate diversity. Eleven out of twenty four infant and junior teachers interviewed made particular mention of Christian heritage as an influence on their thinking. This suggests that this is still a significant feature, although in some of these cases the influence was not very strong. Interestingly, none of the Church of England school teachers talked about this - perhaps it was taken for granted in their situation. This element also seemed less important in the high schools - only two out of eleven teachers mentioned this as an influence or concern, again none from the church school. One junior school teacher commented about her largely Muslim children:

> I believe it is important for these children as they live in a country which is traditionally Christian to be aware of the traditions of the country. I believe as it is important for us to celebrate their festivals, it is also important for them to understand our festivals. I think it is important to show that there is parity. (J3.2.6)

This contains a clear emphasis on the 'Christian heritage' of this country (note the use of possesive pronouns which frequently reveals where the teacher stands), juxtaposed with a

desire to respect all faiths equally - illustrated by the use of the word 'parity'. The same teacher emphasised the importance of a "balanced religious education" which she defined as one in which "we don't get so engrossed in one aspect of religion that the others feel neglected, . . . they have got to feel their worth, they've got to feel that their religion is valued." (J3.2.7). The same themes were present in the primary school which has mainly white children. One teacher said, "I think that children should be aware of other faiths. I think they should be seen as something that is equally valued to our Bible" (P1.1.8). Again we should note the use of possessive pronouns which indicates where the teacher stands in terms of cultural identity, and use of the significant phrase 'equally valued' to describe the relationship between the diverse faiths. Similar comments appeared regularly elsewhere in the interviews: e.g. - "it's a school in England and most of the assemblies are meant to be mostly Christian." (I2.1.9); "we're a supposedly Christian country and worship and that should be predominantly Christian" (J2.3.13).

Apart from the church schools, no school policy actively promoted the idea of emphasising the Christian faith other than to mention the legal requirements. In official policy terms the schools were, for the most part, on the side of a broad multicultural approach, but within the confines of the law. The comments made by the teachers during interviews about the importance of the Christian heritage of this country were not properly reflected in the policy documents. This suggested two things - firstly, that the sample of teachers was not typical of the whole staff (the sample were mostly committed believers or at least sympathetic); and secondly, that there was a discrepancy between the official school policy and what the teachers who lead assemblies actually thought and did.

As I described in chapter two, the tension between valuing all cultures and emphasising the place of the Christian faith is at the heart of the 1988 ERA and is also reflected in many other government and local authority documents (e.g. Circular 1/94 paragraphs 9 cf. 63).

PAGE NUMBERING AS IN THE ORIGINAL THESIS

The second tactic was to ***avoid making evaluative comments*** about different faiths and worldviews. This was a strong feature in most teachers. The usual reason given was fear of causing offence or division within the school as mentioned above. This can lead to the impression that the teacher thinks it does not matter which faith, if any, a pupil follows. However, this is far from the case. One of the teachers who was most emphatic in stressing the multicultural element in his assemblies admitted that there was a real danger of leaving children with the idea that there are just different truths and no such thing as 'truth'. His case illustrated very well the multicultural - Christian heritage tension. He said:

> I don't know a way out of it apart from . . . to say at times . . . 'this is what I believe'. Now . . . there are people in the RE world who would say that I shouldn't really do that, but that I'm meant to be apart from all this, I'm meant to say 'Muslims believe this', 'Christians believe this', 'Hindus believe this', and I am completely neutral to all of it . Now I think there are people who can teach RE like that, but they have no beliefs of their own. I think if you've got your own belief then there is inevitably going to be this tension. (J 2.1.16)

He portrayed his dilemma in vivid terms when describing an assembly which he had done on Sikhism:

> I feel sometimes I've bent over so much that my back hurts, my conscience hurts sometimes; almost I've done that too well. . . . putting the positives of Sikhism forward in a way that was more than actually came from my heart . . . . (J2.1.14)

It seemed that he was being driven by a ***multicultural ideology***, with which he had much, but not total sympathy. This ideology sought to stand aloof from any evaluation and from the question of the truth of different beliefs. It stands in the tradition of the phenomenological approach to RE, but as Cox and Cairns (1989) point out this has important implications for the question of the truth of religious belief:

> All religions were to be respected as being valid, and as seeming to have truth in them if looked at from the point of view of the believer. From this it followed that none of them could be regarded as the norm by which others were to be assessed, so the question of ultimate truth in religion could not be raised. (Cox and Cairns 1989, 19)

Hulmes (1979) argued that the "neutral" teacher does not exist and there was a real danger of the teacher who adopts the uncommitted approach (and the celebration of

diversity is a manifestation of this approach) proselytizing "on behalf of his own scepticism" (p.21). Such an approach could lead to ***indifference***:

> There is uncertainty about the nature of religious truth. There is scepticism about the apparently mutually exclusive truth-claims of different religions. If children are *not* helped to understand the problem of conflicting commitments they may come to a point of indifference about them all, or uncritically assume that their variety signifies a defect in all institutional religion, and thus decide to have none of them.
> (Hulmes 1979, 32; see also p.48)

Increasingly, however, it has been argued that such an approach to the truth of religious belief is not acceptable, both on religious and educational grounds. Cooling (1994, chapter 7), in a discussion of R.E. written from an evangelical viewpoint, argues that schools too readily evade questions of conflict of beliefs. Instead they should emphasise the importance of a concern for the ***pursuit of truth*** in education, which recognises that there is a legitimate variety of beliefs which need to live together. Similar calls have come from other perspectives: Muslim (Muslim Education Forum 1997), Christian (Orchard 1992), educational (Roger 1982, Watson 1987, 30,31,35, Copley 1989b). Although these comments focus mainly on RE in general, they can be applied usefully to the collective worship debate. I will return to this central theme in later chapters.

There were several other reasons for the avoidance of evaluative comments which were given by the teachers - all of which will be examined in later chapters. These included the desire to promote respect, tolerance and understanding (see chapter five); philosophical and theological views about the nature of religious belief (see chapter six); and the individual teacher's lack of knowledge about the various faiths (see chapter seven).

THE CEMENT THAT BINDS US TOGETHER

This is the second important aspect of the theme of inclusivity. Given that the Christian ethos and consensus which had surrounded the 1944 Education Act has weakened greatly in the face of the plural, secular and postmodern trends in society (as described in chapters one and two), those leading assemblies were faced not only with the tension

between the celebration of diversity and the desire to promote 'Christian heritage,' but also with a real question as to the substance of the 'cement which binds us together.'

This problem is further compounded by the challenge from a variety of perspectives to the hegemony of the ideal of liberal education (as described in chapter two). Liberalism can be seen as a possible form of 'social cement' which provides a framework within which people of competing worldviews can live together in political and social harmony. However, the growing critiques of liberal education mean that this is less and less likely to provide an adequate framework for collective worship, and possibly for education as a whole - I will return to this important theme in chapter eight.

The European Values Study suggested that "no overarching European value system exists." (European Values Group 1992, 7). This presents enormous problems to the teacher who seeks to find the common ground holding everyone together in collective worship. The postmodern analysis (described in chapter one) would suggest that the very idea of a centre is a misnomer. Yet there are hints in the writings on postmodernism of a desire to hold things together. Connor (1989, 243ff) asks, "What principle, other than a collective one, indeed a universal one, is going to guarantee the possibility of free negotiation between these multiple centres of interest?" Havel (1996, 214) comments:

> It logically follows that, in today's multicultural world, the truly reliable path to coexistence, to peaceful coexistence and creative cooperation must start from what is at the root of all cultures and what lies infinitely deeper in human hearts and minds than political opinion, convictions, antipathies or sympathies: It must be rooted in self-transcendence. . . . Transcendence as the only real alternative to extinction.

These comments indicate something of the desire to hold everything together and to avoid the complete fragmentation, relativism and ultimately nihilism which is implicit in much postmodern thinking. But with the decline of Christianity in this country and the advance of both secularism and multiculturalism it is no longer obvious what it is that can hold the 'centre'. Teachers who lead collective worship are having to look hard to find suitable candidates.

The teachers' search for 'social cement'

In the research data it seemed that teachers were looking in three main directions for the answer to this question.

The first involved an emphasis on our common humanity. This took at least two different forms: a general and rather ill-defined stress on our ***common humanity*** ("we're all the same" as one teacher (P1.3.9) put it); and emphasising the ***common human search*** concerning basic questions of our existence and, more generally, on shared human experience. (This tended to come from R.E. teachers in high schools - reflecting their approach to R.E.).

There were many comments in the interviews describing our common humanity. Ten out of twenty four infant and junior teachers mentioned this - some several times, and four out of thirteen high school teachers. For example: "if you prick us, we all bleed" (J1.1.14); "the children have said to me the God is the same God . . . so we all come under that one umbrella I suppose" (I2.2.9); it's so true . . . . They are all children, they do all belong to us here, they all have the same rights" (J3.2.5); "we are all people" (J3.1.2); "Everybody is the same" (P1.3.11); "there is a unity amongst human beings" (H2.1.3). Such statements were very rarely justified, they seemed to be axiomatic for the teachers concerned. Occasionally they were derived from religious beliefs such as the idea that we are all God's children.

The second direction in which the teachers turned in their search for 'social cement' was the emphasis on the common ground between faiths. Fifteen out of twenty four infant and junior school teachers focused directly on this perceived common ground - three very strongly; and ten out of thirteen high school teachers also focused on this idea, suggesting this was very important for them. The following comments were typical: "You can take something from all religions" (J4.1.10); I can draw threads from all the different religions because they have so much in common" (I 2.1.3); "you've got to take the common

ground . . . . The staff who take assemblies have the broad spectrum" (J3.1.12); "there is lots of common ground you can draw on in our assemblies" (H1.2.14); "if you have got global agreement on something in relation to faith and the deity of some description, then there must be some sort of commonality in that, that you can hang your hat on" (cH 1.3.11). Sometimes this emphasis assumed that there were ***common beliefs, a common core***, or that ***all religions were aiming towards a common goal***. This is illustrated by the following comments: "I do believe that they are all praying to the same God, that they've just got different ways of doing it" (H 2.3.10); "I think they are pointing to a common truth . . . I think we are all heading in the same way" (I2.1.12); "At the centre of every great religion . . . I believe there is a core of belief that is common" (cJ 1.1.12).

The third direction in which the teachers looked for the 'cement which binds us together' was found in their very common view that there is an underlying, universal moral code to which all people in some way should subscribe. The following comments are typical of many and represent this very strong theme in the interviews: "If you look at all the main faiths, the values that they espouse . . . are values worth pursuing" (P1.1.2); "all faiths have got a basic moral tone to them which you can actually hit on" (cH 1.3.3); "it's the common ground, the stories that are very much alike, or the different values that we have that are very much alike. Everybody has got the same sort of values." (J3.3.11); "You have to go by the fact that there are certain standard rules that most religions seem to go by" (P1.3.5). One of the striking features of the fifty nine observed assemblies is the fact that the vast majority of the subject matter of the assemblies was to do with behaviour and attitudes rather than basic religious beliefs. It was much easier for the teachers to find common ground amongst the former than amongst the latter.

In the interviews the focus on the common moral ground was manifested by the way many teachers spoke of the importance of using the assembly to promote the ethos of the school which usually involved the desire to develop shared values and a school code of behaviour - for example: "It's a time for the school ethos to be transmitted as well, which

is the caring" (I2.2.3); "sharing the values that we have got" (J3.3.4); "it's an opportunity to point out achievements the children have made, and also if there is any particular issue within school, for instance bad behaviour, bullying - it's an opportunity to talk about that in a way that all the children are listening" (J2.2.1); "the ethos of the school as a caring environment" (P1.1.1); "it's a fixed point if you like and it's a non-negotiable part of the school week where we as a school very clearly establish our expectations of the school as a community. . . . this is the touchstone of our expectations in terms of the behaviour" (H 1.2.3).

Both the school and and the government/local authority documents emphasised the promotion of school ethos and shared values. All the schools mentioned shared values in their documents. In every case this commonality was seen in terms of ***general moral values***, and was primarily concerned with behaviour. A guideline in one school said emphatically that: "The 'thought for the day' will be based upon general moral values and have no foundation or affiliation with any religion." (H1). (I shall return to the question of the source of such shared values in chapter six.) Another policy described assembly "as providing a time to expose and reflect upon common values, including moral values." (H2). One junior school policy said, "Assembly helps to reflect the tone and ethos of the school." (J4). An infant policy said that via assembly "the ethos of the school is celebrated . . . and . . . the values and ideals we share are proclaimed." (I1). This has an almost evangelical missionary flavour. The primary school policy said rather prosaically, "Themes are chosen to give opportunity for thinking about values important to the school community, for reflection, for focusing on local and national occasions and for celebrating special occasions, particularly festivals from all the world faiths." (P1).

There is even more emphasis in the Government and LEA documents on the need for a school to develop its own ethos and values. For example, Circular 1/94 says, "The Government has recently required schools to include in their prospectuses a statement of their ethos or shared values." (DFE 1994, paragraph 3). Paragraph 50 of the same

circular says that among the aims of collective worship should be to "promote a common ethos and shared values." The influential OFSTED Inspection Schedule requires inspectors to evaluate and report on the extent to which "the school has aims, values and policies which are reflected through all its work" and also the extent to which "there is a positive ethos." (OFSTED 1995b, Section 6.1) An OFSTED discussion paper says schools should "set their own stance clearly before pupils and parents" and should "have clearly articulated and understood values" (OFSTED 1994b, 14-15). The 1989 Bedfordshire 'Collective Worship' document states that collective worship should "reflect the tone and ethos of the school." (Bedfordshire Education Service 1989, 1). This is reiterated in the Bedfordshire 'Guidelines for writing a school collective worship policy' (Bedfordshire Education Service 1995). Similar comments occur in the SCAA 'Discussion paper number 3' which states that, "The ethos of the school may be apparent through a statement which sets out the values the school intends to promote and which it intends to demonstrate through all aspects of its life." It says that these "core values" should be "acceptable to all" (SCAA 1995a, 8).

The advent of a multicultural, plural society has meant that the issue of what values hold a school together has become a very real one. It is no longer assumed that a watered-down Christian ethos is adhered to by most. The 'National Forum for Values in Education and the Community' (1996) has tried to assist schools by producing a statement of values which they suggest have wide agreement across society. They stress that this is a *de facto* agreement and they are not commenting on the source or authority of these values, although by implication of their method of seeking consensus they are saying that some authority for schools to teach these values is derived from the fact that they are widely agreed. We ought also to note that the Chief Executive of SCAA, Dr. Nick Tate, delivered an attack on moral relativism during the process of producing the SCAA values, as described in chapter two. But as the 1994 OFSTED discussion paper pointed out in the issue of values, "Always, the argument comes back to the questions 'what values?' and 'whose values?'" (OFSTED 1994b, 11). The move in the official government

documents to encourage schools to develop their own ethos and values could be interpreted as an indication that the development of shared values at national level is seen as an impossible task.

Fragmenting and uniting trends in education

Holmes (1992) discussed the problems facing common schools in modern, western multicultural societies. He argues that one of the greatest difficulties now facing school managers is how to hold together the competing demands of the various cultures represented in a school. He comments that the almost inevitable result is a 'low doctrine' common school - one whose common values are limited to those necessary to enable it to function: tolerance, consideration of the other person and non-violence. This 'low doctrine' leads to schools which have little allegiance from parents, pupils or teachers. His solution is to deliberately create a more diverse system of 'high doctrine' schools so that parents could then make their choices to get an education for their children which was closer to their own basic life values.

Holmes approach is one of ***two basic trends in educational policy in response to the plural society***. The two trends are on the one hand, towards more diversity and fragmentation, and on the other hand, towards keeping the common school (even at the expense of having to have a 'low doctrine'). The Swann Report (1985) discussed the relative merits of separate schools for children of different faiths and came down against this for publicly funded county schools on the grounds that it would be too divisive for society, although the recent granting of state aid to Muslim schools indicates that this is no longer government policy.

Uniting trends

Several of the government and local authority documents recognise the difficulties involved in bringing all pupils together for collective worship given the variety of faiths and backgrounds. The OFSTED discussion paper on 'Spiritual, Moral, Social and

Cultural Development' said, "It is vital to press towards a common currency of shared understandings." (OFSTED 1994b, 8). In a similar vein the SCAA discussion paper 'Education for Adult Life' argued that "education needs a common language to discuss values." (SCAA 1996a, 18). There are three major attempts at providing a rationale for unity in the school which can be identified both in my own data and in the surrounding literature. These are - in the educational process itself; in a concept of 'common humanity' (notably spirituality and civic education); and in common moral values.

Unity in the educational process

McCreery (1993) argues that it is the educational process which unites. In my schools' sample the label 'of educational value' seemed to be one which brought immediate approval to an activity. Several school policies emphasised the importance of collective worship being an educational activity. Usually the term 'educational' was left undefined, but the general approach of the teachers was to operate within a liberal conception of education with its beliefs in rationality and objective knowledge.

Gellner (1991) has argued that there are three possible approaches to modern society - he called these "religion" - a fundamentalist view (which believes in a unique revealed Truth); "postmodernism" - a postmodern, relativist view (which sees all knowledge as culture-bound); and "reason". Gellner adopts the last of these positions which he calls "Enlightenment rationalist fundamentalism" and of which he says

> whilst absolutizing no *substantive* conviction . . . [it] does absolutize some formal, one might say procedural, principles of knowledge, and perhaps also (especially in its Kantian version) of moral valuation. (Gellner 1991, 80)

This roughly corresponds with the teachers' widespread confidence in the educational process which gives children both knowledge and the ability to think rationally. However, this approach does not really deal with the critiques of either fundamentalism or postmodernism because it assumes that there is only one form of rationality and objective knowledge - that defined within liberalism. Postmodernists and others (e.g. MacIntyre 1988) would say there are many forms of rationality. Usher and Edwards (1994) have

argued that the very edifice of liberal education is founded upon the assumptions of the Enlightenment which are now being questioned from many directions. Religious fundamentalists (e.g. McGrath 1996, Newbigin 1989) would say that the liberal notion of objective knowledge is flawed because it takes no account of revelation as a source of knowledge.

Unity by searching for common humanity - spiritual and citizenship education

This approach was widespread in the teachers in my sample and took several forms: an emphasis on shared human experience (a common human quest to find meaning and to answer the basic questions of existence); the idea of 'spirituality' as a common human quality which can take religious or non-religious forms; and the concept of 'citizenship' (schools are preparing pupils to be members of a common society in which certain basics of living together need to be agreed).

The SCAA 'Discussion paper number 3' is typical of many comments on the universal appeal of the idea of the ***spiritual***:

> The Education Reform Act refers to a dimension of human existence which is termed the 'spiritual' and which applies to all pupils. The potential for spiritual development is open to everyone and is not confined to the development of religious beliefs or conversion to a particular faith. (SCAA 1995a, 3)

Hay (1990), and Hay with Nye (1998), have argued that the spiritual is a dimension in all people which is under-acknowledged, yet fundamental. Several educationalists have argued for a greater emphasis on this area rather than the narrow and divisive focus of collective worship (e.g. Hull 1995, Hughes and Collins 1996). However, Beck has rightly pointed to the vagueness of the concept, and he comments on the British Humanist Association's endorsement of the inclusive appeal of the notion of spirituality by saying that it "suggests too much common ground; it implies too easily that vitally important differences can be glossed over; it sacrifices clarity for the sake of an at least partially misplaced togetherness." (Beck 1998, 65).

The concept of *'citizenship'* or *civic education* is also used as a means of achieving a shared language to express a fundamental unity of all people. Some (e.g. Hargreaves, quoted in Beck 1998, 73) have seen this as providing a "social cement" to "help create social cohesion." Others (e.g. Beck 1998, 75ff) have argued along more liberal lines that this is a basic educational entitlement. The main purpose of liberal education is the advancement of the rational autonomy of the individual. This can only be done within a framework of agreed common values which are promoted in civic education. The OFSTED discussion document on 'Social, Spiritual, Moral and Cultural development' spoke of the school's role in preparing pupils to "live and function effectively in society," and for "life as a citizen." (OFSTED 1994b, 15). This has been reinforced by the OFSTED inspection requirement for inspectors to examine the extent to which a school develops "an understanding of citizenship." (OFSTED 1995b, 82). This concept is discussed more fully in the SCAA paper 'Education for adult life'. It was suggested here that citizenship education, which has a high priority in other European countries, could be "another possible channel for spiritual and moral development." However, such thinking is in its infancy in this country and they commented that, "Most schools include the intention to teach citizenship in their mission statements but there is no evidence that it is taught systematically." (SCAA 1996a,16).

Unity in common values

Most of the schools and teachers sought to develop a school ethos and to delineate a clear set of shared values as described above. This was in keeping with the government's requirements which were reinforced via OFSTED inspections. Collective worship was seen as a key place for developing, celebrating and reinforcing this ethos. Roger (1982, 158ff) says, "My suggestion is that school assembly, . . . be the point in the school's life where its central commitments are expressed and celebrated." Both school and official government policy seem to have adopted Roger's suggestion.

There has been much discussion and debate about shared values - in particular a growing emphasis on ***values education***. There is a steadily increasing literature in this area (e.g. Ainsworth and Brown 1995, Halstead and Taylor 1996, Shepherd 1998, Beck 1998). Halstead and Taylor (1996, 5) have defined values as

> *principles, fundamental convictions, ideals, standards, or life stances which act as general guides to behaviour or as points of reference in decision-making or the evaluation of beliefs or action and which are closely connected to personal integrity and personal identity.*

They draw attention to the centrality of values in the theory and practice of education as well as the many conflicts of values in a plural society. The framework of common values is a minimal, 'thin' one, and the problem facing the common school is how to make this "minimum framework of values more substantial" in a plural society which cannot agree on the basis of such values. (p.7). I will return to this theme in chapter six. For the purposes of this chapter the key observation is the role that these shared values are thought to have in uniting the school community.

Fragmenting trends

All the above can be seen as the last ditch attempts of liberal education to provide a uniting rationale in the face of the onslaughts of postmodern and fundamentalist thinking, both of which lead in a direction which fragments the school system as was described in chapter two. Both evangelical Christian and Muslim critiques are arguing for an educational system which recognizes more fully the place of fundamental beliefs and values so as to give a greater variety of types of school each with its own educational philosophy which in turn is based on a deeper view of life, possibly religious. These ideas will be further developed in chapter eight.

INTERESTING EXCEPTIONS

There were two interviews with no comments at all in the inclusivity category. This was very striking because all the other interviews had substantial numbers of examples of inclusivity. The most interesting exception to the overwhelming desire for inclusivity

occurred in the interview with a Muslim teacher. The second major exception was that of a Roman Catholic nun who was chaplain in the high school. She, too, for different reasons, did not make any mention of the desire for inclusivity.

The Muslim teacher

The first exception was a Muslim teacher in a county school where the vast majority of pupils were Muslim. His agenda was quite different to the other teachers interviewed because he perceived himself to be a member of a group whose identity was threatened by the pervading liberal orthodoxy which he saw as suppressing the proper expression of Muslim identity in the school context. He was uncomfortable with the 'secular' approach of the senior mangagement team in his school. His main concern was to achieve proper freedom of expression for all religions. He spoke at some length about the need to generate self-confidence among Muslims. He said: "People have to be confident about their own beliefs" (H1.3.6); "We . . . start to instil some confidence into pupils and some self-esteem." (H1.3.7). This resonates with publications from Muslim educational groups. Sarwar (1994) argues for the need to affirm Muslim identity within the education system: at present there is the danger that it will be assimilated. He describes what he considers proper provision for the educational needs of Muslim children which arise from their faith and cultural heritage. Muslim groups have shown considerable unease with the requirement for collective worship. May (1995, 4) wrote, "We are increasingly coming to the view that there should be no statutory requirement for worship. In schools that choose to organise acts of collective worship, pupils should opt in, rather than opt out, by the written consent of the parents." Sarwar (1989), writing in the immediate aftermath of the 1988 ERA, urged Muslim parents to exercise their right to withdraw children from collective worship and to campaign for Islamic collective worship. The reason given for this action was that Muslims face "the dilemma of living within two cultures" and need to struggle "to maintain and develop the distinct identity of their children." (p.11). The threat of mass withdrawal of Muslim pupils was seen as a real one by those schools in my

sample with mostly Muslim pupils. These schools all quickly applied for determinations and held discussions to allay the fears of parents about Christian indoctrination.

Thus from the Muslim point of view the pursuit of inclusivity can act in such a way as to threaten the identity of Islam because the framework within which inclusivity is being promoted is that of liberal education and several of its implicit assumptions about the nature of religious belief are not acceptable to many Muslims. They refuse to be subsumed under the hegemonic umbrella of liberal education.

The Catholic school

The Catholic exception was rather different. When asked directly about inclusivity the chaplain commented: "I don't think about it actually." (cH1.1.8). This was not because it did not matter, but because she took it for granted that the school was a united community and everyone belonged. Here was a school which had an established, formalised and deeply rooted Catholic ethos. One teacher expressed this as follows: "we are standing on a Catholic Christian platform here and . . . everything that runs through is a Christian pathway." "I feel it is my duty to reinforce the Christian nature of the school wherever possible." (cH 1.3.3, 11). Another said, "it's the little things that you have to do that collectively make an impact in a school and create an ethos, create an atmosphere, create, in this case, a Christian school. . . . it's the sharing of Christian Catholic identity." (cH 1.2.2). The Catholics had been accepted into the structure of the education system in a way which the relatively recently arrived Muslims have not been (although some government money was granted to some Muslim schools in January 1998). They were keen to perpetuate Catholic identity, but did not have to battle against what was perceived as a hostile system. In Berger's terms they were operating within their own ***plausibility structure***, and within it they were very confident in their own identity (Berger and Kellner 1981, 63ff). The Catholic church has worked hard to develop this system of schooling which they see as central to nurturing Catholic young people. The school is seen not primarily as an educational institution, but as a community of faith (see Arthur 1995, 57).

CONCLUSIONS - IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

The desire for inclusivity

The desire for inclusivity - to hold the whole school together - occurs in all the main areas of evidence - main interviews, documents, observations. The data is saturated with this theme. What is much less clear is what might constitute this much desired unity. The advent of a plural, postmodern culture has meant that the older assumptions about the place of the Christian faith in this country which surrounded the 1944 Education Act no longer hold true in the same way, although there are some determined efforts to cling on to them. Teachers who lead collective worship are in the difficult position of having to find areas of unity for the children in their school who often come from very different backgrounds and faiths. In this respect the teachers are pioneers who are discovering what might constitute the uniting factors in contemporary Britain. The main areas they focused on in my schools sample were the celebration of diversity (with its associated avoidance of evaluation of faiths); our common humanity and shared experience; and the common ground between faiths - with a particular emphasis on shared moral values.

The implications of this for the understanding of religious belief

However, the way in which they are undertaking this task of finding ways of holding the school together has important implications for the understanding of the nature of religious belief. The over-riding quest for unity has meant that religious belief has been ***marginalised*** in collective worship because it is seen as an area which divides rather than unites, as people have manifestly different beliefs. The overwhelming tendency of the teachers has been to search for 'the cement which binds us together': this has been located in the area of perceived common moral values or in shared human experience rather than in religious beliefs. Where religious beliefs are dealt with, it tends to be in a manner which avoids the potential conflicts of belief by ***privatising*** and ***relativising*** them. They are treated as a private matter because such beliefs are not considered to be part of the common ethos or belief system of the school. They are relativised because all such beliefs are to be seen as 'equally valid': this is usually taken to mean not only that people

of different beliefs deserve equal respect, but that those beliefs do as well. This can easily and inadvertently be raised to an even stronger claim that the beliefs are equally valid and true - i.e a theological pluralism of the type espoused by Hick. Many of the teachers would not agree with such a view if asked about their personal beliefs, but in the context of collective worship this is effectively what they are portraying. The understanding of religious belief is also ***subjectivised*** because the stress is on inner human spiritual experience. It is subjective experience that is central, not beliefs.

These conclusions will be analysed further in chapter eight.

CHAPTER 5

FREEDOM OF CHOICE AND PERSONAL INTEGRITY - "THIS INDIVIDUAL THING"

INTRODUCTION

The second of the four main themes which emerged from the data was summed up by one teacher's phrase "this individual thing". It stands in very sharp contrast to the theme of the last chapter where the emphasis was on community and what binds people together. This second theme took two main forms which were very often intertwined in the data. The first was ***freedom of choice*** - the emphasis on the individual's right to choose his own beliefs and to shape his life by his own independent, freely made choices. The second was ***personal integrity*** - the importance of not compromising anyone's integrity, either deliberately or unwittingly.

This theme was closely related to the teachers' understanding of the ***role of education*** - especially in the development of autonomous, rational individuals. This leads quickly to a consideration of the place within education of commitment to particular values and beliefs, and the presumed tension between education and nurture.

As with all the main themes there were some interesting ***anomalies and exceptions*** to the general pattern. In this case there were three: the Catholic school where an ethos of nurture was dominant; the Muslim teacher whose agenda was driven by his perceived need to establish genuine freedom of belief; and the limits to tolerance shown by some teachers' attitudes.

This main theme had very significant consequences for the ***understanding of religious belief which is operative in collective worship*** - that it is private, individually chosen and constructed, subjective, relative and instrumental in character.

This chapter seeks to describe, justify and analyse these claims.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Evidence from the data

The emphasis on freedom of choice for each individual was illustrated in at least three different ways in the data: allowing an 'open' response, emphasising individual choice, and stressing the right to believe different things.

Allowing an 'open' response - an "individual act", "space to be what they want to be"

Most teachers were well aware of the paradoxical nature of collective worship. On the one hand the word 'collective' implies that people are collected together and makes no assumptions about the beliefs or attitudes of those people: on the other hand the word 'worship' is usually taken to imply a certain type of belief and commitment. This paradox has been commented upon and analysed at great length (e.g. Hull 1975, chapters 2 & 3, Roger 1982, 154). In order to handle this paradoxical situation all the teachers interviewed took great care to allow an 'open' response to what was being said or done in collective worship. This meant that they made no assumptions, at least in terms of religious belief, on behalf of those present; nor did they seek to elicit any particular response of worship, but tried to ensure that individuals could make their own free response in their own terms. One infant school headteacher expressed this by stressing the importance of giving the children "space to be what they want to be" (I2.1.12). Such an emphasis on openness of response occurred in thirty five out of the thirty seven main interviews. The two exceptions were both from the Catholic school where the elements of nurture and presumed Catholic identity were much stronger, but even here there was still a recognition of the importance of freely made individual choices. This will be looked at in a later section.

In the vast majority of the schools and for most acts of collective worship the material was presented in such a way as to allow a variety of possible responses, of which worship could be one for those who wished it. One infant headteacher said "the worship part is a time when I hope every child, if they want to worship and if they understand, that they

can worship in their own way. . . . I want them to be able to worship in their own religion." (I2.1.2). The implication seems to be that each child will make their own individual and internal response, which may or may not be one of worship, to what is presented by the leader of the act of collective worship. One high school deputy head put it this way, "I suppose, in a kind of a very middle class sort of way, you are kind of saying, well you know, we let everybody tangentially get involved in this in whatever way best suits them, but perhaps that's a bit wishy washy and middle class." (H1.2.10). This particular school had almost entirely Muslim pupils, but still no assumptions were being made about their beliefs although in this case it would have been perfectly reasonable to do so. This illustrates how powerful the desire to allow an open response was. This approach was fully, if rather clumsily, articulated by another high school deputy head who said:

> We are, in a way, redefining worship in terms of inside of yourself, think and, if you wish to, give something or someone in relation to that thought what you think they are worth in terms of God or whoever, then internally that is something you can do. Although you may be corporately standing there, collectively standing there, you can make that an individual act if you wish to do so. (H3.1.2)

This comment reveals the individual, subjective and optional character of the response.

All the infant and junior school collective worship policies stressed the importance of allowing an open response. One junior policy (J4) said assemblies "create an atmosphere in which those who wish to worship can do so." Another (J1) said "where appropriate, a period of silent worship, called 'thinking time' is incorporated with suitable guidance." The Church of England school (cJ1) sought to "offer the individual a time for inner, reflective response." Another junior school (J2) wanted to allow "a variety of individual responses including worship." An infant policy (I2) said "worship . . . will frequently leave the response open." All the high school policies emphasised the centrality of an open individual response to the act of collective worship - i.e. one not prescribed by the leader, although in the Catholic school this was often seen in terms of faith development. One policy (H3) stated that the act of collective worship should have "an individual focus" and this should offer "the opportunity for personal reflection or worship." No

school wished to compromise anyone's sincerely held beliefs or force them into an activity about which they had severe reservations or objections. All of them wished to allow pupils a genuinely open choice in matters of belief.

The need to allow an open response in collective worship and not to presume anything on the part of either pupils or teachers in terms of personal beliefs and attitudes also appears in the government and local authority documents. For example, Circular 1/94 (DFE 1994, paragraph 59) says "an act of collective worship should be capable of eliciting a response from pupils, even though on a particular occasion some of the pupils may not feel able actively to identify with the act of worship." The 1992/3 OFSTED report on 'R.E. and Collective Worship' says, "Particularly, but not only, where there was a mixed catchment area, schools provided an umbrella of reverence and reflection which allowed pupils of different faiths to use the prayers, readings or hymns to join in worship on their own terms." (OFSTED 1994a, 30). With regard to religious education in general, the SCAA 'Discussion paper No. 3' speaks of the "ultimate questions of life and death" and says that pupils "must be free to respond to such questions or not, and their response cannot be pre-determined." (SCAA 1995a, 7). In discussing aspects of spiritual development such as beliefs, the sense of awe and wonder, feelings of transcendence, the search for meaning and purpose, they comment that, "Most people can relate to these things, but they differ in their interpretation of them and in the meaning they ascribe to them. Some people attribute these experiences and feelings to physical, sociological or psychological causes. Others find explanations for them in the teachings of their religion . . . ." (p.4). The discussion paper certainly makes no attempt to evaluate between these differing interpretations. The Bedfordshire 'Collective Worship' booklet states clearly that "school worship will frequently leave the level of response open" and that school collective worship should be an activity which "creates an atmosphere in which those who wish to worship can do so" (Bedfordshire Education Service 1989, 4).

This approach of allowing an 'open' response is in keeping with many of the guidelines issued concerning collective worship. For example the Churches' Joint Educational Policy Committee statement said

> the school is no place for either indoctrination or woolly openness. If worship is to be a free activity . . . its observance must allow both its leader and the pupils to respect each other's integrity and freedom. This requires an open atmosphere which creates the opportunity for, but does not dictate, a particular response. (CJEPC 1995, paragraph 2.5.3)

In a similar vein, Brown and Furlong (1996, 18) say that if worship is to contribute to the spiritual development of pupils it should be

> always inviting, never coercing, remembering that pupils will be at different stages of spiritual development and that they should feel able to respond and participate at their own level.

The emphasis on individual choice

Most teachers stressed the importance of the children making up their minds at some stage on their own beliefs and values. This is well illustrated by the following quotations: "it's . . . a matter for the children whether they believe it or not. I try to give them an open-ended aspect of it" (P1.3.11); "I don't think I am responsible for the choices they make" (H3.2.14); "At the end of the day it's their choice whether they choose to believe or not" (J2.3.11). All the teachers interviewed acknowledged the importance of this free choice of the individual pupil. They did this in various different ways - the way prayer or reflection was introduced, the use of story, encouragement to reflect upon personal values and beliefs, an emphasis on education as enhancing choice, an avoidance of perceived indoctrination. All of these will be looked at in more detail below.

The government and local authority documents also emphasise the individual's freedom of choice. The 1988 ERA and Circular 3/89 deal with this by providing the possibilities of withdrawal from collective worship by individual pupils or teachers, and 'determinations' by schools to lift the requirement that the worship shall be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character"; and by stressing that the character of collective worship shall take

into account "the family backgrounds of the pupils concerned" and "their ages and aptitudes." (1988 ERA sections 7, 12). These aspects will be dealt with in a later section.

Individual freedom of choice was emphasised by the Swann Report on multicultural education. It moved firmly in the direction of advocating individual choice from the diversity of lifestyles rather than enculturation into one dominant one by arguing that

> all pupils should be given the knowledge and skills needed not only to contribute positively to shaping the future nature of British society, but also to determine their own individual identities, free from preconceived or imposed stereotypes of their "place" in that society. (Swann 1985, 316-317)

This encouragement of pupils to develop their own personal beliefs and values in a freely chosen way is reinforced by the OFSTED inspection criteria which require inspectors to make judgements which "are concerned with the opportunities given for pupils to learn about and explore different values, beliefs and views and to develop and express their own." (OFSTED 1995c, 89).

The right to believe different things

It is important to note that this freedom of choice to develop personal values, beliefs and views was not all it seemed to be. It mostly applied in the area of religious beliefs; when it came to moral beliefs such openness was not there in the same way. It seemed to be axiomatic that it was not part of the school's task to encourage children into any particular faith, but with regard to morality there was a much more absolutist stance as I shall explore in more depth in the next chapter.

This open attitude to religious belief is illustrated by the following quotation from a Church of England junior school teacher, "To say 'you must believe this' in a school is not acceptable. I would say to a child 'my choice is to believe this, you may choose to believe this,' but to say 'you must believe this' would be wholly unacceptable." (cJ1.1.13). The strength of feeling behind this statement was very strong - individual freedom of choice in religious belief was an educational canon in this case.

A Muslim teacher expressed the importance of freedom of choice as follows:

> My idea of living in Britain is that we have people of different faiths and everybody is free to choose whatever path they want to walk on. And the rest of us we should respect and value them for that. (H1.3.2)

> I tell people that Muslims believe in one God, that there's only one sort of creation, and I tell people that we believe in accountability, and that we believe in the prophets; and if people can find sense in that then it's up to them whether or not to accept Islam or not. (H1.3.10)

The importance of freedom of belief and the right of individual pupils to make their own choices was summed up succintly by an infant school teacher who said, "we live where people can believe different things and it comes back to choices again." (I2.2.10).

This freedom to believe different things is enshrined in article eighteen of the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights which says:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes the right to change his religion or belief, and freedom either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

The teachers' approach is superficially in accord with this declaration although, as we shall see later, the position is complicated by three main factors: firstly, the implicit desire of some to nurture; secondly, the dominant place of Christianity in collective worship; and, thirdly, the hegemonic position of liberal education which can suppress the free expression of other viewpoints.

Four important illustrations of the desire for individual freedom of choice

The importance of allowing an open response and free choice was particularly well illustrated by two activities in collective worship - the use of ***prayer or reflection***, and the use made of ***stories***. It was also illustrated by the emphasis on ***personal development*** and by the strong desire of teachers that material used in assemblies should be ***relevant and useful*** to the pupils. Each of these will now be considered.

The use of prayer or reflection

The desire to allow an open response is particularly well illustrated by the approach taken to prayer or reflection by most teachers. This was an important aspect of collective worship and was used in one form or another by all those interviewed, although with varying degrees of enthusiasm and in diverse forms. In the interviews many said that they did not often use the prescriptive formula 'Let us pray' on the grounds that it presumes too much about the likely response of those present, who may or may not believe in a god, and who may or may not want to pray at that moment in time. They preferred a less prescriptive introduction or a simple invitation to reflect upon what has been said. The following quotations illustrate this approach: "I usually miss out what I myself would call prayer. I tend to say, 'would you like to think about it?' because I don't like to say to children, 'we are now going to pray,'. . . you have to be very careful how you word it to them." (J4.1.2); "I just say 'This is a prayer,' . . . or I might say 'I would like you to close your eyes and just think about these words that I am going to say.'" (J4.1.6).

This approach is in line with that advocated by the CJEPC statement on collective worship which said:

> As with prayers, however, so with hymns or songs - pupils (and staff) should be allowed to observe or to be silent and not be expected to say or sing anything which would be insincerely uttered.
> Equally the willing pupil should be allowed - even encouraged - to make a sincere contribution. (CJEPC 1995, Annex 'A', point (e))

As well as trying to allow the options of praying or not praying, most teachers who used prayers couched them in general terms (i.e. addressed to God rather than Jesus or Father) so as to enable the actual prayer itself to embrace as many types of responses as possible. For example: "I do normally [address prayers in assembly to God] . . . because this Father thing is a big thing with the Muslims . . . . God is God, not a father figure." (J2.2.8); "I stand at the front and lead a prayer and the children in the upper school, who are becoming more aware, may not be addressing their prayer to the same god that I'm addressing it, but as long as it's good for them, then that is fine." (J3.2.12). The last

phrase of this, 'as long as it's good for them, then that is fine,' is particularly telling: it suggests that all that matters is the individual pupil's subjective interpretation of a prayer rather than any corporate, objective understanding.

In some teachers a tension was evident between the need to have openness of response and the desire to have some Christian prayers. One infant teacher (I2.1) acknowledged the diversity of faiths in her school and the need for them not to be compromised. She said, "I think if they are going to be comfortable they have got to be able to pray in their own way." (p.6); "I do try in the general run of assemblies to have a prayer that mentions God. We have one other prayer that begins, 'Father, we thank you for the night, and for the pleasant morning light', and sometimes I feel a little bit uneasy about that one" (p.9). The unease in this case stemmed from the fact that the word 'Father' was a specifically Christian title for God, and she did not want to "threaten the other children" (p.9). And yet this had to be held in tension with the fact that "the prayers have to be Christian. It's important that they are Christian . . . because a lot of the children are Christian, it's a school in England and the assemblies are meant to be mostly Christian" (p.9).

This tension was further illustrated in the the actual practice of leading prayer in collective worship. The observations told a rather different story to the professed allegiance to openness which I have just illustrated from the main interviews. In eighteen out of thirty five infant and junior acts of collective worship the teacher said a prayer addressed to God with little introduction other than the type 'let us pray.' In only nine of these assemblies was the introduction of the more open type which the teachers described in the interviews. It seemed that there was an approved 'open' method in the intentions of the teachers and in the school policies, but in practice the teachers' habits or beliefs proved stronger. There was no prayer or reflection in only three of the thirty five infant and junior assemblies so it was still a very significant part of collective worship. It is likely that although most teachers acknowledged the importance of recognising the diversity of beliefs and the need for openness, nevertheless deeply ingrained habits sometimes shaped

by their own beliefs still moulded what they actually did in collective worship. This led some teachers in a direction which was more confessional than open and liberal. There was a process of change going on, but only slowly. One teacher spoke of how her approach had altered. She said, "up until, maybe two years ago, I would say, 'Let us pray'. And then I re-thought the whole thing. If you want to pray you can do. . . . if you say to them you can say your own prayer, the onus is on them and they don't feel obliged to pray. They can just quietly think." (J3.3.8).

There was a distinct difference between the primary and the high schools in the approach to prayer. In the former prayer seemed to be far more frequent and much more likely to be couched in the terminology of a conventional prayer. In the latter the tendency was to use silent reflection far more: if a prayer was used the teacher normally gave a careful introduction. This approach is well illustrated in the following comments: "We had one Head of Year who on occasions has said, 'I am now going to read a prayer, for some of you this will be a way of expressing your Christian thought, for others of you the words can be used how you want to'" (H2.1.7); "I've never used the word 'prayer'. I might use it and say this is a prayer written by somebody who was a Christian and felt they were able to say this, but I wouldn't actually use it for them to pray." (H2.1.8); "Silence, yes, prayers very rarely" (H3.3.5).

This trend away from traditional prayer was well supported by the observation data from the high schools. In the twenty four acts of collective worship which were observed only five made use of a conventional form of prayer addressed to God and all these were in the Catholic school. In the county high schools out of eighteen assemblies, nine made no use of prayer or reflection, eight made some use of a brief time of reflection, and only one (H2.2) used the words of a prayer. Even this was introduced with the convoluted comment, "I want to finish this assembly by just reading out a prayer. Now I don't expect you to say it with me. I'd like you to listen to the words and think about them because

even if you don't pray them, you might wish some of them." The prayer which then followed was:

> Dear Lord, Thank you for the times when we can rest and work. Thank you for giving us times when we can enjoy ourselves and catch up on all those things we like doing. Help us to use the next week wisely so that we come back afterwards ready to face the rest of year 8 and work. Amen. (H2.2)

The theme of this assembly was the efficient use of time, and it took place just before half term week. Although this prayer is expressed in a format which addresses God, its content is quite general and would be acceptable to a wide variety of backgrounds. It is certainly not emphatically Christian in format or content.

One high school freely admitted that the only reason they included anything like a prayer was to satisfy, as they saw it, the letter of the law:

> I prayed at the end and that is me kow-towing to statute, if you like. The law is unequivocal and therefore we do ask pupils to reflect with their heads bowed for a moment in silence on whatever the theme has been. And I use the word 'pray' because I've not yet found another form of language. I could say, 'I would like you to think about . . .,' but it doesn't seem to have the same connotations. (H1.2.5)

This teacher struggled with two distinct meanings for prayer. One was "communicating with that external deity, whatever it may be, and that therefore, by praying you are going back to acknowledging its existence." The second meaning was, "quiet reflection, internal communication with ourselves, internal communication with one's sense of moral values." He commented that he personally would feel "much more comfortable with the word" if it were used in this second sense in the context of school prayer. He concluded by saying, "if you weren't required to do it by statute . . . . I think I just wouldn't bother." (H1.2.10/11).

The county high school collective worship policies all stressed the use of times of quiet personal reflection rather than prayer - e.g. "Time will be provided each day for pupils to spend in quiet reflection. . . . Assembly leaders end assembly with a general thought or prayer or they ask pupils to reflect upon the assembly theme." (H1). Another policy spoke of "creating an atmosphere of quiet reflection" (H2). Yet another said that

assembly aimed at "providing a break from the busy-ness of life (the 'pause before the plunge')" (H3).

In all schools the local authority documents advised an openness of response in the use of prayers and hymns. Both the Luton 'Focus: Collective Worship' (Luton MERC 1997, 17-18) and the Bedfordshire 'Collective Worship' (Bedfordshire Education Service 1989, 18-21) stress that each of these activities should be done in such a way as to avoid the presumption of any particular beliefs or attitudes in either pupils or staff.

The use of story

Many teachers spoke about the importance of stories in assembly because not only would the children follow them, but also stories allowed a response at many different levels. One teacher said she coped with the diversity of beliefs "basically by being the story-teller" (J4.1.9) because story was open-ended. Another junior teacher described the 'open' character of stories by saying, "there are all sorts of slants you can take from one story and pick up umpteen strands from it" (J3.2.10). The importance and openness of stories were expressed by a junior school teacher who said, "I try to tell them a story that they will enjoy. There's always a story element with mine." A crucial part of story for this teacher was "not being preached at" (J3.3.4/5).

The use of story was much more pronounced in the infant and junior schools where twelve out of twenty four teachers stressed it; in the high schools only one teacher out of thirteen mentioned it. Part of the reason for this imbalance would be pedagogical - more styles of presentation would be open to the high school teacher dealing with older children.

Personal and spiritual development

Freedom of choice was further illustrated in all the data by a strong theme which emphasised the development of personal beliefs and values. This was usually seen in

highly individualistic terms. There were many comments from teachers which illustrated this. One Catholic high school teacher sought to "guide them and help them formulate their own opinions . . . and how they are going to live their life" (cH1.3.4). He said later, "That's one of the aims of assemblies - to try and get the depth of reflection and thought increasing." (cH1.3.14). Reflection was a key theme for one junior school teacher who said, "I keep going back to this reflective bit. I think it is terribly important to give them an opportunity to think about things." (J3.3.3). The theme of reflection and thinking was particularly strong in the high schools - this was illustrated by the comment of one teacher who said of assembly, "it's almost a place where you can hold something . . . up for examination and just even to pose the question and say, here is this, what do you think about it. Not give them any answers necessarily, but, here is this idea, think about it." (H2.1.4).

All the high school collective worship policies contained this theme of individual and personal development. It embraced a sense of self-worth and identity, and personal values and development. One policy (H3) said assembly should "allow for individual response by . . . enabling children to explore their own beliefs and values in relation to others; . . . offering the opportunity for personal reflection or worship." Another (H1) suggested that assembly should be seen as "an opportunity for pupils to quietly reflect upon, or talk about, their own values, things of importance to the individual and their role in society." The infant and junior policy documents all wanted to contribute to the personal development of the children - spiritual, moral, social and cultural. Frequently the concept of spiritual development was seen as something which transcended all beliefs. One school's policy stated, "Spiritual development . . . transcends the potential barriers of religious and cultural difference . . . spiritual growth is not dependent on a child having a secure faith background" (J2). The spiritual was seen as concerned with a person's "inner life" and with "basic human questions."

Government and local authority guidelines also contained a strong emphasis on the development of the individual. The 1988 ERA [section 1.(2)] stipulated that the curriculum of the school should be one which

> (a) promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society; and
> (b) prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

Spiritual development is not defined in this Act, but is explored in other government documents, notably from OFSTED and SCAA. Here it was usually seen in terms of the individual forging their own views and beliefs in a freely chosen way. The school's task in this process was not to impose or dictate, but to provide information and understanding so that pupils were enabled to make informed choices. For example, OFSTED inspectors are to look for evidence of "whether pupils are encouraged to articulate their own views and beliefs" (OFSTED 1995b, 62), and whether the school "seeks to enrich its pupils' knowledge and experience of their own and other cultural traditions" (OFSTED 1995b, 85). The 1994 OFSTED discussion paper has a very strong individualistic trend. The very first paragraph states that education is "also about personal development in its fullest sense" (OFSTED 1994b, 1). It argues that there is a "moral maze" and that pupils "need to be equipped with their own 'Ariadne's thread' to guide them through that maze." (p.1). This image is strikingly individualistic. The same paper later comments (pp.8-10) that spiritual development

> is concerned with how an individual acquires personal beliefs and values . . . . deals with what is supremely personal and unique to each individual. . . . [It] leaves open the radically different nature of individual responses and the answers to such questions to which individuals may come. It concentrates particularly on the process of exploring . . . . [Pupils are seen as] autonomous moral agents . . .[who] acquire value-systems which are their own (rather than simply transmitted by others and accepted uncritically, . . .)

This trend is continued in the SCAA documents. 'Discussion paper Number 3' (SCAA 1995a) underlines the importance of "individual identity; . . . recognizing and valuing the worth of each individual" (p.4), and of enabling children in moral areas "to come to their own judgements" (p.5) and to "develop for themselves a set of socially acceptable values

and principles, and set guidelines to govern their own behaviour." (p.6). It is stated quite clearly that, "The task of schools, in partnership with the home, is to furnish pupils with the knowledge and the ability to question and reason which will enable them to develop their own value system and to make responsible decisions on such [moral] matters." (p.6). This individualistic trend continues in SCAA 'Discussion paper Number 6'. It says:

> Spirituality is a powerful force that determines what we are, our self-understanding, our outlook on life, others and the world, and consequently shapes our behaviour . . . . The human spirit engaged in a search for truth could be a definition of education, challenging young people to explore and develop their own spirituality and helping them in their own search for truth. (SCAA 1996a, 6)

The LEA documents continue in a similar vein. The Luton 'Focus: Collective Worship' quotes the OFSTED description of spiritual development as relating "to that aspect of inner life through which pupils acquire insights into their personal existence which are of enduring worth." It also comments that "spiritual development is concerned with how an individual develops personal beliefs and values, especially on questions about religion . . " (Luton MERC 1997, 2). The Bedfordshire booklet on 'Collective Worship' says that in collective worship, "Pupils will be encouraged to explore their own experience, to be open and questioning and to discover things for themselves." (Bedfordshire Education Service 1989, 7)

'Something to connect to' - the desire for relevance

The fourth illustration from the data of the emphasis on individual freedom of choice was provided by the strong desire of the teachers for collective worship to be an occasion which was meaningful and relevant to the children - as one teacher put it 'something to connect to."

Twenty threee out of twenty four infant and junior school teachers and eight out of thirteen high school teachers stressed the importance of relevance and acessibility in the assembly material. The following comments from the interviews illustrate this concern and were typical of many: "you can talk to them about things that relate to them. . . . I've tried to bring things to their level." (J3.2.6); "something that connects" H2.1.5);

"linking it to what's going on in their daily lives . . . . grounded in something that's . . . a concrete issue with them" (cH1.2.6). In all the assemblies observed it was clear that the teachers gave a high priority to providing material and stimulus which related directly to the children's world.

All teachers wanted to achieve relevance and to use accessible material. A survey of secondary school pupils in East Yorkshire by Bryan (1997) suggested that most pupils found assembly irrelevant and uninteresting. At its lowest level this desire by teachers for relevance can be seen as a survival tactic. A few hundred bored children cooped together in a hall with only a handful of teachers is not a happy prospect for the leader of collective worship!

This desire may also stem from an emphasis on experiential learning reflecting the work of Loukes on R.E. in the 1960s. Loukes (1961) argued that RE should begin with issues and problems which were of concern to the pupils and only then build links to Christian and biblical teaching. He called this the "problem method". Many of the older teachers would have been trained at a time when the ideas of Loukes were very influential.

Hull (1984) has argued in a related way that a theological rationale for collective worship should begin with the child's concerns and only then proceed to matters of "ultimate concern" (drawing on the theology of Tillich). Hull said:

> School worship does not bite sufficiently deeply into the genuine concerns of pupils . . . . Our task in school assembly then is to take the most transparent, the most symbolic of the concerns of our pupils, in the hope that they will be led from the trivial and the immediate and the local to the significant, the enduring, and the univeral concern. (Hull 1984, 13)

This strong emphasis on the need for relevance reflects an individualistic and pragmatic approach to collective worship - what matters is that each individual child is helped to develop personal ideas and views which are of direct use to them in their lives.

Some implications of the stress on individual freedom of choice

Osborn (1995, 53ff) has argued that the Enlightenment saw the development of the ideal of the "autonomous individual" (literally a law unto himself), "who relies upon his or her own reason to determine right and wrong." In such an environment personal identity is found, not essentially in membership of groups, but rather via personal choices and achievements. He argues, perhaps rather sweepingly, that, "Since the Enlightenment the self has been declared sovereign; we are the creators of our own ends and purposes." (p.94). Sacks (1991, 42) depicts individualistic liberalism by saying that, "our moral imagination is bounded by three central themes - autonomy, equality and rights - the values that allow each of us to be whatever we choose. The central character of our moral drama . . . is the free self." My data indicates that schools are following such a policy in their encouragement of each individual pupil to determine their own belief structure. Beck (1998, 82) has argued that "the requirement to make active *choices* - between competing comprehensive value systems, alternative lifestyles, different occupational possibilities, etc. - will be *inescapable* for more and more individuals . . . ." Living "the wholly unexamined life" will be "less and less possible" and therefore children have a "*strong educational entitlement* . . . to receive an education which seeks seriously to help them to develop their potential for rational autonomy." This individualistic, liberal approach has been strongly challenged by Sacks who argues that, "The contradiction at the heart of individualism is that there can be a self unencumbered by tradition, unfettered in its freedom." (Sacks 1991, 44). Sacks emphasises the importance of communities and tradition in the formation of the individual - I will return to this important debate in chapter eight.

PERSONAL INTEGRITY

After freedom of choice, the desire to respect personal integrity was the second main aspect of 'this individual thing.' This desire was expressed in at least six different ways: not causing unnecessary offence, avoiding hypocrisy, encouraging respect and tolerance for all people, having regard for the pupils' family and cultural background, taking into

account the age of the pupils, and not indoctrinating. The first five of these will be dealt with in this section, the last one in the next section on the role of education.

This approach was in line with that advocated in the CJEPC 1995 statement which was typical of many of the guidelines for collective worship issued by faith groups and others. It said that:

> The leader must neither infringe the integrity of particular believers nor appear to require hypocritical responses from pupils and staff. Sincerity and integrity are essential in the practice of worship - and not merely in the act of believing - and in the celebration of experience or diversity. (CJEPC 1995, paragraph 5.5)

Not causing unnecessary offence - "treading on egg shells"

Teachers were very aware that they may unwittingly offend pupils' religious sensibilities through lack of detailed knowledge on their part and this caused them to be cautious in what they said and, in particular, not to make value judgements on matters of religious faith. One teacher described the experience of leading collective worship in a multifaith school as "treading on egg shells" (J4.2.7). This theme occurred frequently and strongly throughout the interviews. It appeared in twenty out of twenty four infant and junior interviews and in eight out of nine county high school interviews. One teacher summed up the views of most by saying, "You go out of your way not to do things which would cause offence" (J3.2.5). This theme did not appear at all in the Catholic high school indicating a far greater confidence in that more homogeneous environment as to what was and was not acceptable.

Avoiding hypocrisy

This was a relatively weak theme in the interviews which suggests that the schools had managed to devise ways of leading collective worship which avoided this danger. The strong emphasis of all the schools was that collective worship should be an occasion in which all could join regardless of their background or basic beliefs. Various tactics had been devised by the schools to enable this to happen, many of which have already been described - e.g. the use of more general and inclusive hymns, allowing an 'open' response,

celebrating the diversity of beliefs, the avoidance of evaluative comments about beliefs, focusing on common ground between beliefs and especially moral issues, always prefacing comments about beliefs by such phrases as 'Christians believe . . .' or 'Muslims believe . . .', and the avoidance of areas of potential conflict between beliefs.

In the government documents the main provisions in the 1988 Education Reform Act for the avoidance of hypocrisy were: the right of withdrawal for both pupils and teachers from the act of collective worship (retained from the 1944 Education Act); the ability of the school to apply for a 'determination' (section 12); and the requirement that the collective worship should take into account the family backgrounds, ages and aptitudes of the pupils [section 7.(5)]. Of these provisions very little use was made in my sample schools of the right of withdrawal - the main group being Jehovah's Witnesses. The OFSTED report on 'Religious Education and Collective Worship 1992 - 1993' confirmed that this is the trend nationally. (OFSTED 1994a, paragraphs 66 & 73). Three of my sample schools, those with almost entirely Muslim pupils, had used the 'determination' procedure.

Encouraging respect and tolerance

This was a strong theme in all the schools as described in chapter four. This attitude was also widely represented in the government and local authority documents. Circular 1/94 says that religious education and collective worship "have a role in promoting respect for and understanding of those with different beliefs and religious practices from their own . . . . This country has a long tradition of religious freedom which should be preserved." (DFE 1994, paragraph 9). A similar sentiment is repeated in paragraph sixteen. The promotion of attitudes of respect and understanding are looked for specifically in the OFSTED inspection schedule (OFSTED 1995b, 63). It is commended in both the SCAA discussion papers (SCAA 1995a, 7; 1996a, 8), in the Luton 'Focus: Collective Worship' (Luton MERC 1997, 17), and in the Bedfordshire Education Service publications

'Collective Worship' (1989, 25) and 'Guidelines for Writing a School Collective Worship Policy' (1995, paragraph 3).

Often the need for respect and tolerance for different people became an equal regard for different beliefs: what began as an essentially ethical policy to enable people of different beliefs to live together has effectively become an epistemology which reflects a theological pluralism that treats all beliefs as equally valid. It was often assumed that such things as respect and tolerance were unequivocally desirable and little attempt was made to analyse these concepts and to look at their consequences - e.g. that it could lead to a facile acceptance of profoundly flawed views.

Having regard for family background

As I have already mentioned, this is required in the 1988 ERA. We should note that this is the first time that such a clause has been included in the legislation and is a real recognition of the multicultural character of British society. It is this aspect of the primary legislation which the Muslim community in particular are focusing on in their bid to ensure that their identity is not compromised (e.g. Muslim Education Forum 1997, 9 & 17). Regard for the pupils' family and cultural background was mentioned in twenty five out of thirty seven main interviews. The following comment was typical: "in a county school you've got to be . . . aware of the views and the backgrounds." (I1.2.2).

Having regard for the pupils' age

Most teachers were well aware of the capacities of the children with regard to their age and stage of development as the following comments illustrate: "as they get older, I think, they have begun to make up their own minds and are more certain what they believe in." (cJ1.4.12); "the age of the children definitely affects the way you treat the assembly." (H2.1.11); "the older they get the more likely they are to take things in" (P1.3.7).

Many of those in my sample who lead collective worship will have trained or been teaching at a time when the work of Goldman (1964), referred to in chaper two, was influential. Although several of his conclusions have been questioned since, it seems that there is a legacy in many teachers in terms of thinking that a child's ability to consider matters of religious belief and make their own choices in this cannot occur until at least the secondary school stage.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

Most of the teachers interviewed were very aware of the powerful and influential role which education plays in the lives of children, and of their own position as teachers and educators. They were concerned not to mis-use this position of power either by limiting their pupils' freedom of choice or by abusing their personal integrity. This was particularly pertinent in the area of religious beliefs and other world views where people take up very different stances and there is legitimate disagreement. How were the teachers to present this aspect of life in the context of collective worship so as to be true to their role as educators and also true to their own individual beliefs? Hull (1975) had argued that there was a radical dichotomy between worship and education. The former assumes belief and involves commitment and a closing of the mind, the latter scrutinises belief and implies a radical, open and critical attitude. Hull argued that "worship and education can never take place concurrently" (p.59) and he highlighted a key issue facing teachers:

> How, in the public schools of a pluralist democracy, are controversial questions to be dealt with? This is one of the basic questions facing education systems in the western world today. (p.55)

This issue faced those who led collective worship in my schools sample. I shall examine how they dealt with it under two main headings. Firstly, education for choice - the idea that the role of the educator was to make pupils aware of a wider range of options by increasing their knowledge so that they can then make their own free choices; and

secondly the tension between education and nurture, which will include some comments on indoctrination.

Education for choice - the teacher as a "catalyst"

All of the teachers interviewed bar one emphasised the importance of making children aware of the religious and cultural diversity of the world. One of the key purposes of doing this was to enhance the range of choices open to them. The teachers did not see their role as making choices for the pupils, but rather, as one teacher put it, as a "catalyst" in the process of choosing. No-one saw the school's task as promoting any particular faith; rather the school's job was to increase the children's awareness of the different faiths and belief systems so that they could make their own informed judgements at an appropriate stage. The one exception was the chaplain of the Catholic school whose agenda was heavily dominated by a desire to nurture young people in the Catholic faith. This will be examined in the next section on exceptions and anomalies.

This aim of enhancing choices seemed to be deep-rooted in the teachers' conception of the purpose of education. There seemed to be an assumption that it was possible to present information in a 'neutral' way so that the children simply gathered this information in an unbiased way, and then made choices according to certain (rational?) criteria. This probably reflected the prevalence of a liberal philosophy of education, with an assumption of 'objective' knowledge. It seemed that for some teachers the concept of 'knowledge' was not problematic and it was treated in an uncritical way. For example, one infant teacher said, "I am very aware that the children don't have much knowledge and I feel it is up to us to give them the knowledge." (I2.3.15). One teacher summed up this approach of education for increased choice as follows:

> I don't think I am responsible for the choices they make. I can help them to make the choice, I can provide information, I can tell them where to look, but I don't think it is my responsibility to tell them which way to go. (H3.2.14)

Similar sentiments were expressed by a teacher with an evangelical Christian background:

> I suppose I view what I say as my opinion and recognise that other people have different opinions. . . . sometimes I will say this is what I believe. . . . I feel it's a chance for me to state what I've found to be helpful and that they can then take that and use it as they will. At the end of the day it's their choice whether they choose to believe or not. I can only offer what I believe. . . . (J2.3.11)

> I believe you have got to make your own choice. You can't force children into it. You can tell them about it, you can encourage them, you can share what you believe, but you can't push it onto them. (J2.3.16)

The main emphasis in most of the teachers was on the giving of information and the extending of awareness rather than focusing on ways of making decisions between the various views. As one junior school teacher (J4.3) put it:

> We are making children aware of different aspects of religion, not just one way. (p.1)

> [Collective Worship involves] being aware that there is another form of god and perhaps extending their beliefs - well not beliefs - way of thinking.(p.2)

> We are here to give the children an opportunity of learning, of being aware . . . . presenting them with these things - here's your chance as it were. (p.5)

The key phrase in this is ***"here's your chance"*** which very clearly expresses the aim of the teacher to increase the range of choice open to the children. Education is about expanding horizons. This approach of 'education for choice' was a powerful theme across all the schools. It was summed up by a high school teacher who said:

> It's to show them the possibilities, to show them the opportunities, help them to make their own choices, it's not for me to stand there and tell them what I think; my role more is to be a catalyst and to say 'what about?' or 'have you thought about, have you considered?' (H3.2.12)

There was a very notable lack of direction about how to make these much trumpeted choices. This issue was not addressed in collective worship. The most commonly used word was 'reflection' - children were simply encouraged to 'reflect' on the issues placed before them with no explanation as to what such a process might involve. It was a term which was virtually undefined by the teachers - perhaps as a way of avoiding giving guidance on how to make choices in these contentious areas, This may be because it is better handled in the context of a Religious Education class, or it may be because teachers thought that the making of these choices is a personal matter and to give guidance on how

to do this might imply that some choices were better than others or it might impair the pupil's freedom of choice. It seemed that the right to make your own choices in this area was paramount, and any considerations about the 'rightness' or 'desirability' of those choices was secondary.

There are many places where this liberal ideal of education for individual choice is described and explained. For example, Hull (1984, 14) suggests that worship in LEA schools should be abandoned "because this worship tries to do what it cannot and ought not try to do, and because it is failing to fulful an educational potential which it might otherwise realize." Instead he suggests that assemblies should, from time to time, be used to impart some understanding of other religions and "the aim of these assemblies is not to secure commitment nor to profess faith but *to deepen understanding and facilitate choice*." (p.15 - my italics) The Swann Report takes a similar view:

> One of the major aims of education should, in our view, be to broaden the horizon of *all* pupils to a greater understanding and appreciation of the diversity of value systems and lifestyles which are now present in our society . . . . (Swann 1985, 465)

Swann was firmly in favour of the 'phenomenological' approach to RE as

> the only means of enhancing the understanding of all pupils, from whatever religious background, of the plurality of faiths in contemporary Britain, of bringing them to an understanding of the nature of belief and the religious dimension of human existence, and of helping them to appreciate the diverse and sometimes conflicting life stances which exist and *thus enabling them to determine (and justify) their own religious position.* (pp.474-475 - my italics)

Sacks (1995, 35) reminds us that the liberal view, with its emphasis on individual choices, is by no means the only vision of education in modern society. He contrasts a traditional, community-based view with the liberal view: "Education is no longer seen as the induction of the young into the rules and virtues of society. Rather, it has become a way of helping children make private choices as individuals." Haldane (1990, 190ff) argues that the liberal view

> presupposes a view of society that is fundamentally individualistic. In this conception the community is no more than a voluntary association of persons and it is to

> individuals that all knowledge and values are attributable. Each of us must determine for ourselves the whole content of our systems and beliefs . . . .

This view sees the role of education as equipping children with the means of acquiring "knowledge" rather than promoting a particular world-view. He contrasts this with the "communitarian view" which "holds that society is more than an aggregate of individuals," and that, "Education is essentially the transmission of understanding: of what is the case and what ought to be done." Hirst (1990, 305ff) distinguishes between "primitive education" (which he sees as the passing on by a group or community of whatever they consider to be "true or valuable"), with what he calls the "sophisticated view of education" which is "dominated by a concern for knowledge, for truth, for reasons, distinguishing these clearly from mere belief, conjecture and subjective preference." Hirst expresses a clear belief in what he calls "the canons of objectivity and reason" (p.309) - a concept which is now widely seen as a product of the Enlightenment. I shall return later to the question of the various critiques of liberal education.

Education and nurture

The tension between the role of the school and the teacher's own beliefs and values

There was a distinct tension in many of the teachers, especially those with a strong personal faith, between the desire to give an open education, which genuinely allowed the pupils to form their own free opinions and values, and the desire to nurture the children into particular ways of thinking and living. This was not simply a matter of different religious beliefs, but was concerned with basic values and attitudes to life. Some teachers were concerned that pupils should learn about the Christian tradition, including prayer and worship. Often this was expressed in a manner which suggested a nurturing approach was being adopted. One infant school teacher who was a regular churchgoer said her aim in one assembly was "to tell the children we all have worries and that we can take our worries to God and share them" (I2.3.3). The same teacher said a little later, "you have to be careful you're not indoctrinating, don't you, your ideas" (I2.3.5) illustrating precisely that she was ***caught between two worlds***, that of her Christian faith, its

presuppositions and desire for nurture and that of her role as a county school teacher and the presuppositions of an open, critical education she brought with that.

One county infant school (I2) with a mixed cultural background had a school prayer, which began, "I'm very glad of God." This was sung on most days at assembly and, as the deputy head said, "obviously has a very Christian bias" (I2.2.8). This was unusual in a county school, but it does illustrate well the inconsistency between the desire to provide an 'open' education which attempts to be even-handed between faiths and the desire to engage in some nurturing in a particular faith. This tension is further illustrated by the suggestion from two high school teachers that school prayers may be quite feasible if introduced at the start, so that the pupils learned the habit. One said, "I think if you started in Year 7, I think you could actually do prayers, some sort of collective worship and they got used to it, so it was a normal sort of thing, so it's like, 'come in, take your coats off' and it is accepted." (H2.3.3); and the other commented, "I think they could be brought round to it [saying prayers] gradually" (H3.3.8).

An infant school teacher was concerned that the children should learn what it means to pray and to worship. She felt part of her aim was "teaching them to pray and giving them an understanding of what prayer is about" (I2.1.9). The same teacher said she could "show the Christian children how to be a Christian" (I2.1.3). She doubted whether she could also show the Muslim children how to be Muslims, or the Hindu children how to be Hindus, simply because of her own background.

One Muslim teacher spoke of his desire to tell people what Muslims believe so that they were at least aware of the Muslim option of faith, but he also felt constrained in what he could say by the "secular" philosophy of the school. (H1.3.3,8). This is a particularly interesting example because most of the pupils in the school were Muslim and yet the prevailing ideology was an 'open liberal' one which attempted to be neutral with regard to religion and in so doing was perceived as repressive by this teacher.

One Christian high school teacher, when asked about the major influences on the way she led collective worship replied, "personally as a Christian, wanting them to know what's in the Bible and to be aware of it. To think about, not necessarily to think about God, but to think about the fact that there is something beyond themselves." (H3.2.6). This comment neatly reveals the tension between education and nurture. Her aim was to give information about the Bible and the Christian faith so that the pupils could make their own decisions. Yet the fact that she said she was doing this 'as a Christian' suggests that she might privately be pleased if a pupil were to use their choice to follow the Christian faith i.e. an implicit nurturing aim.

An evangelical junior school teacher (J2.3) was much more open about his aim of nurturing, and yet doing it in a way which respected the children's freedom of choice. He said, "I try to portray something of what I believe the character of God is like, something that's meaningful and useful for the children, either to educate them more as to what God is like, or something that is useful for their day to day life." (p.3). He wanted to give the children "some kind of education in religion and faith and what it is to worship" (p.4). One of his aims in his assembly was to show the children "that God is interested in them" (p.5). He suggested that "the help I have gained from my Christian faith, the way that helps me with my life, . . . can be a help to the children too. . . . when you've found something good, you want to pass it on." (p.6). This same teacher was very concerned also to respect the children's freedom of choice. He saw his role as offering his beliefs, and then the children could make up their own minds. (p.11).

This tension between education and nurture was usually acknowledged freely by teachers with regard to religious belief. What was not so much acknowledged was the possibility that nurturing into the values and ethos of liberal education might be occurring because these were part of the 'taken-for-granted' assumptions of the school. Hulmes (1979, 35) points out that the "refusal to accept the claims of one religion over another is not a tactful refusal to *choose*. It constitutes a choice . . . ." Schools' Council 'Working Paper

Number 36' was very clear that the assumptions of liberal education were paramount in the school situation. In a discussion of the 'Christian as RE teacher' it comments:

> Education presupposes a common basis of agreement about what constitutes knowledge and what is only an opinion. At the present time Christianity, in the view of the majority, falls in the second category. . . . Christianity as truth no longer belongs to this common basis of agreement . . . .
>
> The teacher who is a Christian will find himself involved in both education and proclamation - he is both a Christian *teacher* and a *Christian* teacher. . . . In a secular education system he must stand on the side of education; his task is to educate children. (Schools' Council 1971, 92-93)

I will return to this issue under the heading of indoctrination.

Many of the school policies stressed the importance of the educational value of the assembly. Most schools had difficulty with the idea of worship for worship's sake and sought to justify it on 'educational' grounds. One policy (H3) suggested that "assemblies should have a curricular focus by . . . being integral to the total educational experience of the child." The word 'educational' was not defined in the document, but the context indicated that an open, liberal understanding was being assumed. This emphasis on an 'educational' justification for collective worship appeared in many writers (e.g. Gent 1989,7; Hughes and Collins 1996, 8; editorial in BJRE 12.2, 67). Alves (1991, 174) argued that the 1988 Education Reform Act had achieved "the establishment of religious education (including the provision of school worship) as an essentially educational activity."

<u>The tension between the role of the school and the role of the family</u>

The role of the teacher as a catalyst in expanding horizons and enhancing choices involves him in a complex relationship with the children's home and family backgrounds. A junior teacher (J3.2) from a school with mostly Muslim children spoke of her concern to "give the children breadth of experience of religious stories, sacred writings" (p.2). She was well aware of a delicate balance to be held in this process between her role as an educator

(expanding horizons) and proper respect for the children's religious background. She said:

> Most of these children their world stops around Bury Park [an area of Luton], it starts again in Pakistan . . . . although you are trying to stretch the child's experience you need to be aware of the limitations . . . . (p.12)

This indicates a tension facing the teachers: on the one hand they want to expand the children's horizons, stretch their experience so as to enhance their ability to make their own free choices in matters of belief; and yet on the other hand they profess to an approach which respects and takes account of the children's family background and very often this means the children have been carefully nurtured in a particular faith. A few teachers thought they should simply support the home tradition of the child. One said, "We are there to support the parents' values, which is what we do" (J3.3.11). More common was the view which saw matters of belief as the prerogative of the home rather than the school. One primary school teacher expressed this by saying:

> It is up to you and your family what you eventually believe in. I am not going to tell you that you are wrong, nobody should tell you that you are wrong if that is what you believe in. I am trying to get them to say, if they believe, their faith must be first. But they should not then say that that derides every other faith, to try to allow different faiths. . . . It's a matter for the child whether they believe it or not. I try to give them an open ended aspect of it. (P1.3.10/11)

This teacher saw his role as encouraging tolerance and respect for other beliefs by making the children more aware of the diversity of belief, but when it came to choosing what to believe it was very clearly the domain of the child and his family.

This tension between home and school values was recognised in the government and local authority documents which emphasised the importance of the children's family backgrounds, and also their ages and aptitudes. This is explicitly stated in the 1988 ERA, section 7.(5). It is underlined in Circular 3/89 (paragraphs 5 & 35) and is reinforced in Circular 1/94 (paragraph 66) which says that "any departure from the broadly Christian requirement must be justified in terms of the family backgrounds, ages and aptitudes of the pupils concerned." The SCAA 'Discussion paper no. 6' recognised that "the values of

school and home would at times clash, making it all the more important to develop shared values and greater affinity between school and home." (SCAA 1996a, 17) The major example of this occurs in those county schools which have mostly Muslim pupils. Despite the fact that most of these pupils have a very clear belief in God, the prevailing climate was still the 'open, liberal' one which did not assume any such beliefs. It is not surprising therefore that the initial Muslim reaction to the 1988 ERA was often to recommend parents to exercise the legal right of withdrawal from collective worship (e.g. Muslim Educational Trust 1989, 3), and in one or two schools in the country this happened on a substantial scale as described in chapter two.

The fear of indoctrination

Most teachers had a profound fear of indoctrination and were very careful in the way they conducted assembly so as to avoid such a charge. Fourteen out of twenty four infant and junior school teachers, and seven out of thirteen high school teachers mentioned their fear of indoctrination during the interviews despite there being no direct question about this. Eight of these teachers mentioned this matter on three or more separate instances in the interview. It was clearly an issue which they considered important and the desire to avoid the charge of indoctination occurred across all teachers regardless of their own religious beliefs as the following quotations show: "I feel uncomfortable because it is my belief, you see, and I am worried about indoctrination" (J4.1.8); "It looks as though if you do a Christian assembly you are imparting your beliefs, but you aren't and I think that's very, very important. I would never say to the children 'I believe this, therefore it's right.' I would never say to a child, 'Well, you believe that, but I believe this.'" (J3.2.6/7); "We keep right away from the, 'this is the way you do it and we're all going to do it this way because it's right.' That's indoctrination . . and that's a faith group, that's not a school. Our school is a multi-faith group." (J3.1.10); "you have to be very careful that you're not trying to indoctrinate, or you're not introducing your own ideas." (J2.2.2); "I don't want to be seen to be promoting denominations or indeed organised religion of any sort" (H1.2.8).

One teacher shied away from describing views as true for fear of indoctrination. She said, "I feel it is part of indoctrination to actually say this is the truth" (H3.2.15). No teacher wanted to say simply, 'this is the truth.' Most opted for a formula such as 'Christians believe . . .', but some were prepared to declare their own beliefs. For example one junior school teacher said:

> I am quite happy to very strongly state my belief, my opinion, . . . and then it's up to the children. I also feel then that there's no argument. Nobody can come and argue with me particularly that I am indoctrinating these children because obviously you hear stories about that, but merely sharing what I believe and I have to be found helpful. If they don't believe that, they don't believe that. (J2.3.14/15)

Other teachers were very reluctant to declare their beliefs on the grounds that merely to state this would be to exert undue influence on the children.

Several teachers had strongly held views about which faith is the 'best', but were very reluctant to say so in an assembly. One junior headteacher said, "I sometimes, to myself only, will say, 'well, my way's best anyway!' But that is to myself. You can never, ever say that. You cannot as a head have a strongly held view that says what I do is right, what you do is wrong." (J3.1.11). Another junior school teacher who was a Christian said, "if you start being really explicit and saying this is what you have to believe, this is what is the truth, although that's what I think, I feel I can't say that." (J2.2.6). One teacher who saw Christianity as the right way would not say so in the context of assembly "because that's my view of the truth and it's not giving people the opportunity to make their own choices. You know as a teacher . . . they do look up to you, they do respect your opinion, and I think it would be wrong. It would be me trying to influence them." (H3.2.13). This view was not quite as consistent as it might seem. A little earlier in the interview the teacher had said, "I try very hard to do something religious I suppose within an assembly, but try not to force it." (H3.2.3).

There were several other comments which illustrate how widespread and deep this aversion to indoctrination was: "I don't think it is right to use my role in the school to basically be a propagandist. . . . you shouldn't be using your captive audience to be a

missionary." (H2.2.15); "I'm just sensitive to not overdoing it on my own beliefs." (H2.3.9); "I don't think anybody particularly imposes their own views on the children." (cJ1.4.12); "I don't feel I am employed to preach to the children. I am a Christian, who is a teacher. I am not a teacher of Christianity, I suppose." (J2.3.14).

Sometimes teachers would say they do not want to indoctrinate when their behaviour in assembly comes very close to that. One infant teacher (I2.3) described the aim of her assembly as putting across the idea "that God loves us and cares for us all, whoever we are, whatever we are, and He knows and loves us all" (p.4). A little later in the interview she said, "you have to be careful you're not indoctrinating, don't you, your ideas" (p.5); "You have to be careful you're not over the top . . . . I suppose if I said to the children, 'we all do this', . . . and, 'everybody must believe in this', and, 'this is what really happened', . . . I would try not to do that." (p.10). This same teacher, when pressed about whether there were any beliefs (e.g. very racist ones) which she would say were wrong, answered, "I think I would try and win them over, and say, 'that can't be true.'" (p.14). There were, in other words, a certain category of beliefs, usually moral in nature, into which the children were to be nurtured.

Some teachers made a distinction between 'facts' - historical or scientific, and 'opinions'. Religious beliefs usually were seen in the latter category, and therefore could not be portrayed as 'true', at least in any straightforward sense. One junior school teacher's usual response to questions of religious belief was, 'I don't know. What do you think?' She was prepared to give a more definitive reply if she could actually say to them there is hard historical evidence here. (J3.3.13).

The fear of indoctrination was never far from the surface in many government and local authority documents. The SCAA 'Discussion paper no. 6' (1996a, 17) reported the results of a research project on attitudes among student teachers which suggested that they "were reluctant to be seen to impose values on young people." The Bedfordshire

Education Service booklet on 'Collective Worship' (1989, 5) said that, "School worship is not required to affirm or proclaim, but to 'reflect' these broad traditions of Christian belief."

Value-free education?

The data above suggests that the teachers were generally operating within a liberal model of education which saw the freedom of the individual as a very high priority, and the giving of objective knowledge as the task of the educator so that proper choices could be made. Such a view also consigns religious belief to the private domain. Within this liberal rationalist framework indoctrination is seen as morally objectionable and as violating basic principles of rationality, freedom, and respect for the individual. However, it has been argued by Thiessen (1993) not only that the meaning of the term 'indoctrination' is very unclear, but that it also depends upon a narrow ideal of liberal education (with its associated concepts of autonomy, rationality and critical openness) stemming from the Enlightenment which is not sufficiently sensitive to the importance of the traditions into which a child is nurtured. He argues for a new ideal of liberal education which is based upon a more open recognition of underlying beliefs, and a greater variety of schools.

It has been argued extensively by others, as described in chapter two, that the liberal view of education is itself deeply value-laden, and hence the sharp distinction between open, critical education and indoctrination is much less clear-cut than might be suggested by the comments and fears of many of the teachers in my sample. Astley (1994, chapter four) argues that we are dealing here with "a spectrum of merging colors rather than a sharp borderline of black and white" (p.44). Mitchell (1970, 358) has pointed to Murray's comment on Euripides:

> "Every man who possesses real vitality can be seen as the resultant of two forces. He is first the child of a particular . . . tradition. He is secondly, in one degree or another a rebel against that tradition. And the best traditions make the best rebels."

The various critiques of liberal education (described in chapter two) have all argued, albeit in different ways, for a much more open recognition of the place of traditions, values and beliefs in education.

ANOMALIES AND EXCEPTIONS

There are three main areas to examine under this heading: the Church schools especially the Catholic one, the approach of the Muslim teacher, and the limits to 'tolerance' shown by some teachers with a self-professed liberal attitude.

The Church Schools - a stronger sense of nurture

As might be expected the strongest sense of nurture came from the Church schools. It is interesting to see how the balance is held between nurture and respecting the individual's freedom of choice. The Church schools had a strong sense of both of these things. Their status as Church schools enabled them to follow a different agenda because this is what the parents had opted for by sending their children there. This was most pronounced in the Catholic school. One of the Catholic high school teachers put it this way:

> Personally I think one of the differences is that the unity of purpose makes it a lot easier because we can make a whole load of assumptions about each other which we can't make in a county school . . . . everyone expects it, everyone accepts it . . . that's what happens here . . . . (cH1.2.3)

This teacher had a strong sense of the nurturing role of the school, but this included an interesting variant on the theme of freedom of choice. She says:

> It's an opportunity . . . to draw them into our way of thinking, to help guide them in the way they make their decisions throughout the day . . . . (p.4)

> Our main concern is, are we educating the whole person, will this person be able to cope with life, have they got the faith, the values, the equipment to go out and carry on an adult life when they leave here? (p.7)

> I think it's actually good for them to see what practising Catholics actually do, and to give them the chance to opt in . . . . I would see it as appealing . . . to the best in them, although I don't consider that I am forcing something down their throats. I am offering them something . . . which they can respond to or not. (p.11)

> Our own joy and our own faith means we really want to be encouraging others to live it too. (p.15)

Similar sentiments could be found in one of the other Catholic high school teachers (cH1.3):

> My aim is, perhaps, to return them into a Christian outlook . . . . (p.3)
>
> I like to think, maybe, that I pass on some of the things I have learnt over the years . . . . (p.7)
>
> I think you have got to guide their thoughts along Christian ways and we try and do that as much as possible, but I think you have got to leave some open questions at the end of statements, to say you have got to think about this, it's not just closed. (p.13)

The Church of England school teachers were much less emphatic in their desire to nurture faith. One teacher expressed this by saying, "I do not believe the school is a church and I have strong doubts that we have the right to actually ask for a commitment to the Christian faith." (cJ1.1.3). The same teacher spoke of "pushing across the message in a constant way" (p.4). What she seemed to mean by "the message" was "nurturing within the children what I would see as Christian principles, basic good caring principles" (p.4) - i.e. her focus seemed to be on behaviour rather than belief. She summed up the tension facing teachers in Church of England schools as follows, "there's a very, very fine line between evangelism and teaching from time to time" (p.12). For her anything remotely like evangelism was unacceptable.

When it came to the observed assemblies, both schools had religious symbols on the walls of the hall - a cross in each case. There was noticeably more ritual in the Catholic school than in the C.of E. school. In the former all the assemblies began with the pupils making the 'sign of the cross' and saying, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen". They usually said the 'Our Father' and 'Hail Mary' on a regular basis. Prayer was always included as a natural part of the assembly and Christian teaching was embedded in the way the assemblies were done. It was unmistakeably Christian worship. In the C.of E. school they ended with the 'Grace' and often said the 'Lord's Prayer'. Christian songs were regularly used. Often however the approach seemed to be an 'implicit, neo-confessional' one in that the main themes were ones which could be

found in any school (e.g. friends, bullying), but these were then given a Christian slant. The very distinctively Christian doctrines (such as the Incarnation, Resurrection, Sin and Forgiveness, Death and the Afterlife) were not dealt with as a central feature of the assemblies. They dealt with very similar issues to the county schools, but gave them a religious coating - i.e. the substance of the messages was often very similar in terms of, for example, personal development, being kind and caring people, concern for the environment and so on.

This trend was also evident in the school documents. The policy documents of the Catholic high school were very different in tone to those of the county schools, although there were several common themes: the idea of community was central, but the prospectus described the school as "a caring Catholic community"; the value of the individual was emphasised, but this was underpinned by the concept of "the unique, God-given nature of each individual"; the importance of morality was stressed, but this was understood in terms of "the principles of the great commandment: Love God and Love our neighbour"; the concept of individual, personal development was there, but seen in the light of trying "to help our young people towards growth in faith, and in terms of helping each member of the community in their faith journey", and elsewhere it was commented that "each individual within our school community is on a personal journey of faith towards his/her God"; the idea of preparation for adult life was present, but expressed as preparing students to be "responsible citizens whose Christian values inform and guide their dealing with people and the environment."

A central belief was that "each person is equally deserving of respect, tolerance, understanding and opportunity, regardless of ability, gender, race, age or creed." (p.2). However, this tolerance did not express itself in the celebration of festivals from a diversity of faiths as in the county schools. The pattern of worship was firmly Catholic. It infused the whole school. The Inspection of Denominational Character and Religious Education described the school as a "worshipping community" (p.9). There were regular

end of term masses, voluntary weekly masses, and masses on Holy Days of Obligation and of these the school policy stated, "Students are very strongly encouraged to go to these Masses, but they are not to be compelled." In addition there was a Prayer Bell rung at 9.10am every morning to mark the time for class prayer. This emphasises the corporate nature of the belief structure.

The declared policy of the Catholic school was very definitely one of nurture. Generally speaking the whole staff were to make "especially explicit through R.E., Assemblies and the daily Act of Worship, our Catholic religious, spiritual and moral values." The Inspection mentioned above said, "The school has been very successful in articulating and building an ethos that reflects its aims and one that is entirely consistent with the Gospel values on which the school has been established." (p.11). This was summed up in the main sentence of the school's Mission Statement which said, "Together towards our Lord, through learning, love and faith with Christ in all we do." However, as I noted above, this clear aim was clouded by the substance of the assemblies very often omitting the really distinctive Christian doctrines, thus muting the counter-cultural impact of this Catholic education.

The Church of England school policy documents are similar in this respect. The 'mission statement' declares:

> Our overall aim is to develop the "whole" child and to provide a broadly based and well balanced curriculum within a safe and caring Christian environment which equips each child for life and enables each child to fulfil his/her potential.

A list of fourteen school aims includes only one which uses the word 'Christian'- this is "to promote Christian values and to maintain links with the local churches." This is hardly very distinctive as many county schools would want to say that they also promote 'Christian values'. The emphasis is on values rather than beliefs. The 'Collective Worship Policy' is a little more emphatic, but even this contains the tension between education and nurture. The first aim of collective worship is "to nurture the children in

the Christian faith, providing them with opportunities for thought, prayer, reflection and celebration in a caring atmosphere." This seems to qualify the aim of nurture with an approach to collective worship which would be very similar to that of many county schools. Anglican schools are usually predominantly neighbourhood schools and so are very different in character to the Catholic schools which take mainly Catholic children. Hence the Anglican schools have a fine line to tread between their role as church school and their role as neighbourhood school and this is reflected in the documents.

The Muslim teacher

The school in this case was almost entirely Muslim children and yet it had a powerful liberal secular ideology when it came to collective worship and, not surprisingly, the Muslim teacher found this oppressive. In the school policy it was stated that "the *Thought for the day* will be based upon general moral values and have no foundation or affiliation with any religion." The aim of assemblies was "to encourage pupils to develop a moral and spiritual dimension to their lives" and the word "spiritual" was defined as meaning "inner self". Overall the school policy is couched in very general terms and takes no account whatsoever of the fact that the majority of pupils are Muslim. The only thing where this has been taken into account is the fact that the school has a 'determination' which releases them from the requirement that collective worship shall be "mainly or wholly of a broadly Christian character." But the character of the collective worship which does occur is influenced far more by liberal presuppositions than by the Muslim background of the pupils. For example they had 'Islamic assemblies', but the strict understanding of these was that they were to give information ***about*** the Islamic faith, they were not to involve pupils in Islamic worship.

The Muslim teacher found this liberal, secular regime oppressive. He commented:

> We've got quite a lot of Muslims attending a secular school, when it comes to fitting in worship, a secular school - it doesn't really mix, so they just want a point of reflection, they aim worship in no specific direction. . . . and when you direct worship in any sort of direction it doesn't really have any value. . . . It's not easy to talk about God in a school like this. (H1.3.2/3)

The situation in this school demonstrated very clearly the hegemony of liberal educational presuppositions in the area of collective worship.

Limits to 'tolerance'

Many teachers had professed an attitude of respect and tolerance for different faiths, and this was repeated in all the school policies as the official line. However there was a limit to this tolerance which revealed itself when a faith involved a viewpoint that was substantially at variance with the teacher's own (usually liberal) position. This found its clearest expression in the Muslim attitude to women. Several teachers said they had great difficulty with this. One infant school teacher expressed the tension she felt over this matter:

> I've found it quite difficult to deal with the way some of the cultures in our community treat their women, and their daughters in particular. But, you know, it's not my place to, I mean educationally I think it's been my place sometimes. It's not fair that she has to stay at home to look after the baby because she's just as entitled to her day's education as the brother is . . . . (I2.2.11)

A junior school teacher who was very committed to multicultural education said:

> I personally look on, for example, the Muslim attitude to women as something I find sometimes deeply offensive and they are almost second-class creations of God . . . . I feel very uncomfortable about that. But that is not something that I would, certainly would not talk to the whole school. I might in a year 6 situation . . . . (J2.1.13)

A teacher at the Catholic school said that the "message of toleration, acceptance of other people's ways of doing things, however different is very much part of what the school believes the pupils should be encouraged." (cH1.2.12). And yet she also professed, "there are some things about the . . . role of women in Islam that I find very difficult to understand." (p.13).

All three of these examples show how the professed attitude of respect and tolerance had definite limits and these usually occurred when there was significant conflict between a view and that of liberalism which was the prevailing ideology for many teachers in this context.

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

The strong emphasis on freedom of choice and personal integrity which emerged from my data has substantial implications for the understanding of the nature of religious belief. In summary, it leads to religious belief being seen as a matter for ***private, individual choice***. This, in turn, contains an understanding of religious belief which sees it as ***relative and pragmatic***. The teachers' view of the place of religious belief in collective worship is a combination of modern, liberal thinking which stresses the freedom of the individual and the private nature of faith, together with some postmodern ideas which suggest that there is no 'Truth' only many 'truths,' that there is no real conflict just different ways of seeing the world, and that truth has a chosen and constructed character. These claims will be briefly described here and then analysed in more depth in the final chapter.

A private matter - "as a teacher I don't want to get involved"

Most teachers took the view that it was not the role of a public or common school to promote any particular faith. This implies that religious belief is essentially a private matter for individuals and their families. Many of the above quotations provide evidence that this view was widespread in my sample. Bruce (1995, 93) has argued that the division between 'public' and 'private' life has been a key feature of modern societies and that the impact of secularisation and pluralisation has meant that religion has been "confined to the private sphere." However, this division between public and private is not simple and in a postmodern world may be breaking down. McLaughlin (1995a, 239ff) has argued that balancing the demands of commonality and diversity is a complex process which requires an understanding of the nature of both so-called 'public values' and the more controversial 'non-public' views. In addition, this division depends upon a conception 'publicly agreed' values. As confidence in an overarching rationality weakens so does the possibility of agreed areas of overlap between competing views.

An individual matter - "religion is a personal thing"

The teachers stressed time and time again the importance of each individual child making their own free choices. There was little support for the idea of being nurtured into the ways of a community when it came to religious belief. The individual's right to make their own independent choice was paramount.

There was little recognition of the fact that the children were being nurtured into the norms and ways of liberalism, but at a time when confidence in an overarching rationality has been severely weakened. Cox and Cairns (1989, 68ff) argued that:

> In the 1970s there was a tacit assumption that the ideal individualism to which education was directed was that of the liberal rationalist, whose attitudes were shaped by intellectual discipline and rigorous discussion. At no time did it seem necessary to consider the consequences of such unlimited individualism either to persons or to society. But there is in the 1980s - a time characterized by increasing violence, by consumerism, and by sometimes aggressive self-assertion - the temptation to posit a connection between undirected individualism and social ills.

We need not agree with Cox and Cairns' diagnosis of the possible causes of social ills, but their notion of 'undirected individualism' is an apt description of the attitude to religious belief in collective worship.

A matter of choice - "if you believe it, it is true"

Many teachers stressed that religious belief was a matter of individual choice. They mostly saw their task as making children aware of the choices before them rather than giving guidance or evaluation concerning those choices. This might lead in the direction of indifference to the choices to be made, and to the idea that these choices are arbitrary ones - there are no rational grounds on which to make the choice and it ultimately does not matter which choice is made because issues of truth are not at stake. What matters about a religious belief is whether or not it helps you along in life - i.e. religious belief is not a cognitive affair, but a pragmatic one. In this respect some of the teachers are leaning in a distinctly postmodern direction - beliefs can be chosen and constructed and as long as they work for you that is all that matters.

This approach is similar to Cupitt's voluntarist view of religious belief which was described in chapter one. Cupitt (1984, 19) suggested that religious beliefs

> are not universal truths, but community-truths, and they guide lives rather than describe facts. . . . Our beliefs are rules of life dressed up in pictures, giving symbolic expression to our commitment to a particular community, its values, its sense of the shape and direction a human life should have - in a word, its spirituality. . . . There are in the human world many complete and coherent spiritualities or ways of life. . . . our most fundamental beliefs have simply to be chosen. Their 'truth' is not descriptive or factual truth, but the truth about the way they work out in our lives.

Such a view is deeply controversial, but it seems that the way collective worship is being undertaken can lead to this understanding of religious belief.

"That's fine if that's what you believe"

The individually chosen nature of religious belief was well illustrated by a junior school teacher whom I asked how she would handle the conflicting Muslim and Christian versions of Christmas. If the children ask her about this her tactic is to say, "I don't know. What do you think?" The children then "sit and look at me and . . . they will give me a story back or tell me what they believe, and I'll say '*that's fine if that is what you believe*'" (J3.3.13). This final phrase (my emphasis) suggests that belief is validated simply by having been chosen. The same teacher spoke of things which could be proven from historical documents as being in a different category to religious belief. In the historical domain it was perfectly acceptable educationally to deal with the questions of truth and falsity as there was an agreed rational way of settling these questions. In the religious domain, however, the teacher could not easily deal with the issue of truth and falsity and had to leave this matter to individual choice. In this approach she was operating firmly within a liberal framework. One of the problems with this is that it is often done in such a way as to imply a relativist understanding of religious belief. McLaughlin (1995a, 251) has pointed out this danger.

"If you believe it, it is true"

The same point was made by a primary school teacher who, in reply to the same question about different versions of the Christmas story, said:

> What I am trying to say is that these are outlines, it is up to you and your family what you eventually believe in. I am not going to tell you that you are wrong, nobody should tell you that you are wrong if that is what you believe in. I am trying to get them to say, if they believe, their faith must be first . . . . if somebody believes that, that is their right, I would not do anything to stop it. . . . as a teacher I don't want to get involved with being pro or anti because that is how you upset people. Both those points I would say religion is a personal thing. (P1.3.10/11)

A little later in the interview this teacher said, revealingly, "*well, if you believe it, it is true.*" (p.11 - my emphasis). Hulmes (1979) gives a useful account of the various approaches which can be taken to religious differences between Christianity and Islam. One of these approaches he describes as follows:

> *Both Christianity and Islam become true in the individual's response.* Writing of Christianity, W.Cantwell Smith says, "It is not true absolutely, impersonally, statically; rather it can *become* true, if, and as, you and I appropriate it to ourselves, and interiorize it, insofar as we live it out from day to day." (Hulmes 1979, 63 - original italics)

This would seem to describe accurately the approach taken by the primary school teacher.

Differences in belief - "it doesn't matter"

Another junior school teacher, in a school with mostly Muslim children, took the approach of "presenting both stories" with regard to the birth of Christ, and "making it absolutely plain to them that this is your one." He did try "to draw from both of them key messages" (J1.2.10) - i.e. looking for common ground - a common liberal approach. But he also then said with regard to the conflict between the stories:

> I don't see it as a problem. Yes, they are aware of the conflict, they are aware that they believe something different to what I believe in and what I try and do is just get over the message that it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter that much that their belief . . . is different. (J1.2.10)

Hulmes (1979) has pointed out that teacher neutrality and the overwhelming desire for 'tolerance' can lead to indifference. He argues that it is vital for children to understand

that there is something at stake in the conflict between religious truth-claims and that the choices we make do matter. He wrote:

> There is uncertainty about the nature of religious truth. There is scepticism about the apparently mutually exclusive truth-claims of different religions. If children are *not* helped to understand the problem of conflicting commitments they may come to a point of indifference about them all . . . . (p.32)

An implicit relativism

If each individual can make their own personal choice and there are no rational, agreed grounds for preferring one choice against another then all beliefs become equally valid - indeed they are validated for that person by the choosing of them, an inherently relativistic approach. This was illustrated by a junior school teacher who, on occasions said to her children "whatever the name of your god, make up a prayer to your god," and she suggested that "they have no problem with that whatsoever." (J4.2.10). She later spoke of the children "finding their own way of worshipping and *what is right and true for them*." (J4.2.13, my emphasis).

Bruce (1995, chapter 5) has argued that religious beliefs are no longer part of the common "taken for granted world" (p.130) and that they are now "obviously a matter of choice" (p.131). He suggests that "individualism" - "the right to make choices" and "the right to define reality" (p.134) is the key feature for understanding the place of religion in modern society. There is considerable evidence in my data that the teachers are taking precisely this attitude to religious belief - at least in the semi-public context of collective worship if not in their own personal beliefs. Bruce points out that this approach leads to an "epistemological relativism" because people's versions of reality inevitably clash. He says:

> The religious deviants of previous ages, though they departed from the consensus in specific claims, none the less contended for what they believed in to be *the* truth. Our New Age seekers deny the possibility of any authority beyond the preferences of the individual. (p.135)

These claims are backed up by the findings of the European Values Study which says that "for any particular individual, a highly integrated world view may exist, but its components may be quite dissimilar from those of any other person's world view. Individualism may result in a preoccupation with oneself and a highly relativistic outlook." (European Values Group 1992, 5).

Sacks (1991, 88) sums up this situation by saying that there has been

> a wider disintegration brought about by the loss of what Peter Berger called 'the sacred canopy,' that overarching framework of shared meanings that once shaped individuals into a society. In its place has come pluralism: the idea that society is a neutral arena of private choices where every vision of the good carries its own credentials of authenticity.

In many ways this is reflected in the changes in collective worship since the 1944 Education Act.

A pragmatic approach to religious belief?

The concern for relevance and meaning described above may show a pragmatic, instrumental approach to religious belief - it is true if it works. This way of understanding the nature of religious belief is reminiscent of William James (1908). His major focus was on the influence of beliefs in someone's life - was it useful as a guide for living? This was raised to the status of an epistemological theory - something was 'true' if it worked. In today's plural, postmodern environment such an approach can seem very attractive to a teacher whose task it is to hold together all the competing religious beliefs in one act of collective worship. 'Truth' is located in the utilility and function of the belief and therefore is personal to the believer. This dispenses with many of the problems of conflicting beliefs. They are not cognitive propositions, but useful rules to guide living. As long as they are useful to a person then they are 'true' for that person. The apparent conflict between beliefs evaporates.

Writers other than James have developed this idea that the 'truth' of a belief is found in its utility. Braithwaite (1971) argued that religious assertions are essentially the intention to

act in a certain way and the association of this intention with a particular set of religious stories. He attacked the overuse of the verification principle (that the meaning of a statement was found in its verification) and argued that for religious statements the meaning is to be found in their use. Bellah (1976) argued that the identification of religion with the acceptance of certain cognitive propositions was a temporary western abberation. A far more important role for religion is to provide meaning and motivation for a person's life. Credal and metaphysical statements are secondary to this.

Thus in emphasing relevance and meaning the teachers may implicitly be affirming an ***instrumental, pragmatic*** approach to religious belief - the really important thing is how those beliefs work in the life of the believer.

CONCLUSION

Many writers (e.g. Roger 1982, Watson 1987, Orchard 1992, Wright 1993, Cooling 1994) have argued that the approach to religious belief which is implicit in much modern education is deeply unsatisfactory and highly susceptible to the charge of relativism. There needs to be a recovery of confidence in the idea of the pursuit of truth in education and a proper consideration of questions of religious differences which acknowedges that issues of truth are at stake and matters of religious belief cannot simply be pushed into the area of 'private opinion'.

My data suggests that this understanding of religious belief (as private, individually chosen, relative and instrumental) is being perpetuated in collective worship. It is a situation which is no longer tenable in a postmodern, plural world which will not allow the continuing hegemony of the liberal understanding of education. Other voices are clamouring to be heard.

CHAPTER 6

THE HEART OF AN ACT OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP - MORAL, SPIRITUAL OR RELIGIOUS?

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I shall examine the different directions in which the teachers turned in order to provide what in their view constituted an acceptable and satisfactory assembly. These mostly involved turning the activity labelled 'collective worship' in directions other than traditional worship of God - "worship in any sort of direction" (H1.3.2) as one teacher expressed it. These different directions were neatly summarised by various phrases used in the interviews as alternatives for 'collective worship'. The first, and most prevalent of these directions, was to use assembly as a vehicle for moral encouragement (an "act of collective responsibility" - P1.3.3). The second was to redefine 'worship' in the school context in a variety of different ways to make it more widely acceptable: these ways included an emphasis on reflection on matters of 'ultimate worth' ("a corporate act of thinking" - H3.1.1), and also on 'spirituality' and personal development ("an act of spirituality that . . . is collective" - J2.1.11). There were also some teachers who wished to maintain a more traditional, theistic approach to school worship (a "true act of worship" - J4.1.3). This theme might be summed up by asking ***where the heart of an assembly lay***?

As with all the four major themes there are some exceptions and anomalies which I will describe and analyse.

The tactics adopted by the teachers to make the assembly acceptable have important consequences for the understanding of religious belief. These will be dealt with in the final section of this chapter. This will include the results of the teacher questionnaire which was described in chapter three.

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Collective worship as important, but deeply problematic

The main interviews indicated that the teachers' attitudes to the 'worship' aspect of collective worship were paradoxical: on the one hand worship was seen as extremely important, on the other hand it was also deeply problematic. All twenty four infant and junior school teachers stressed the importance of assembly and, for most of them, they did not want it to become entirely secular in character. However, fifteen of them said clearly that the worship requirement was a real problem. The following quotations about the worship aspect give a flavour of the tensions involved for the teachers and are typical of many: "a really necessary part of the school day . . . . important . . . . a very difficult area . . . . problematic" (J4.1.1); "Worship is praising the Lord, just because it's a school and they're children it can't be. . . . we won't necessarily be worshipping. Rightly or wrongly, it isn't as strongly worship as it should be." (J4.1.8); acts of collective worship "are extremely important. I wouldn't like to see them disappear in the way they've started to disappear in high schools" (J3.2.1); "I regard this [collective worship] as a very important time both for the collective worship side and also the assembly side because obviously they are two distinct things. . . . As far as the worship is concerned I'm less comfortable with that because you can't force people to worship" (P1.1.1).

As we can see from these quotations, the main problem is caused by the requirement for worship and the apparent conflict of this with open, critical education (Webster 1995, 121ff, Hull 1975). This tension is reflected by McCreery (1993, 23ff) who describes two models for school worship - the 'religious', which requires commitment to certain beliefs; and what she calls the 'worth-ship' model which entails the celebration of shared values and the consideration of things of 'worth'. She argues that the second model is the only one appropriate for the 'non-religious' county schools because it enables everyone to participate.

In the high schools the problematic element became far more pronounced: none of the county school teachers wanted the requirement of worship. The furthest they went in this direction was to provide a time of quiet reflection. Assemblies were useful for the purposes of community cohesion and reflection on common values, but when it came to worship in anything like a traditional sense a line was firmly drawn - this was unacceptable. The simple result was that they did not do it - at least the 'worship' part. This was partly due to practical reasons, and partly because it was considered an inappropriate activity for a variety of reasons including the undesirability of coercion, the likelihood of hypocrisy and artificiality, and that it was meaningless to most participants. One teacher, who had a Christian background herself and was in charge of collective worship at her school, put this very strongly:

> I am totally opposed to any acts of collective worship on the basis that I think worship is something that can only be done by somebody in a believing community. I don't think it is true worship if you are imposing an act of worship on people, they are not actually worshipping. . . . in the average school, out of a group of 200 students there, there may be a handful who, if you conducted an act of worship, would actually be trying to worship, who it would be real to, and possibly no members of staff. So the whole thing then is a very artificial affair, and because of that, I think it degrades what is called worship and doesn't actually do anything to encourage students to worship. It means nothing to them . . . .
> . . . I really do not believe it has any value. (H2.1.2 & 3)

What she was so opposed to was the requirement for worship, not assemblies in themselves:

> I think there is a value in assemblies. . . . in bringing students together in large groups . . . to do community things, school community acts - like acknowledging the achievements of students. To also have something like a theme, whereby you are putting across, if you like, a moral, in inverted commas, message. . . . it is much more of a celebratory thing, or a chance to just put a new, perhaps a spiritual perspective on it - spiritual in its widest sense. (H2.1.3)

This reflects closely the views of McCreery (1993) cited above. Webster (1995,111ff) argues for an "educational justification for worship" which

> does not compromise the integrity of the teachers and children by attributing faith to them when none is present. It takes seriously the background, interests and experiences of pupils and respects those without religious belief, for it is not exclusive. Encouraging exploration of views rather than uncritical acceptance of them, it asks for the use of reason and imagination, feeling and thinking of a high

> calibre. Engaging with world religions at a thoughtful level, it fosters respect and tolerance of them. (Webster 1995, 114)

Another high school teacher (H1.2), this time an agnostic, who was responsible for assemblies, had strong views, similar to the teacher quoted above:

> I personally don't feel there's a place for the promotion of collective worship and the promotion of religion in a comprehensive school system, philosophically or morally. There is statutorily - we have to do it. My personal view is that it is primarily the responsibilities of families and communities and schools of a denominational nature to promote collective worship and to promote faith and religion, and I don't personally feel that it is a role of a comprehensive school to do that. Having said that, I think there is, in terms of our responsibilities towards developing the whole child, the whole pupil; I do think we do have a responsibility towards enriching the spiritual dimension or the spiritual sensibilities of young people. (p.2)

> I think there is a place for worship in school, but I think it's place is with groups of consenting individuals . . . so, for example, we have Muslim prayers at lunchtime . . . . (p.4)

> For me, collective worship has the connotations of presenting the answers, if you like, and that's where I have problems to stand up in front of a group of young people . . . and say, 'I am telling you this'. (p.15)

As with the previous teacher, this one viewed assemblies as valuable for celebrating the school community, putting forward moral ideas, and exploring spirituality (pp.5/6). A teacher from the same school put her view more bluntly, "I think it is an imposition by the government which is an absolute disgrace . . . . grossly unfair. . . . It's become a nonsense really" (H1.1.1).

Another high school teacher (H2.2) with a strong Christian background said she had had "tremendous conscience searching" (p.3) over whether or not to promote the worship aspect, but ended up with a focus on moral ideas rather than worship. She said, "I wouldn't have a problem if somebody said you don't have to do the worship bit" (p.7). Part of her reasoning for this is that worship in a school setting would be hypocritical for many, "Worship is something that is so fundamentally part of actually believing in your religion . . . perhaps in the past we have been very hypocritical." (p.5). However she did want something which was more than mere administration. It required some kind of focus which was difficult for her to define (p.7).

Another high school teacher said of collective worship, "It's very difficult when you've got a multi-faith school, and when you've got children who don't believe in God anyway . . . . you've not only got the pupils there that don't believe in a God and think it's a load of rubbish and feel they're being forced to do something, but you've also got staff." (H3.2.3); "I think the whole concept of worship is very difficult." (H3.2.16). The main reasons here for the problems appear to be the diversity of belief and the coercion. These have been quoted at length because they give an indication of the depth of feeling against the requirement for worship, especially in the high schools.

These problems with the concept of school worship are scarcely new. As described in chapter two there has been an increasingly loud chorus concerning its problematic nature, especially since the mid-1960s. In 1975, John Hull wrote an influential book entitled 'School Worship: An Obituary' in which he outlined many of the problems. The interesting thing nearly twenty five years later is why it has not yet died completely. Certainly in the high schools 'worship' has almost died, but this is not so in the infant and junior schools. I will return to this division below. The way schools have coped is by radically redefining worship. Hull (1975, 125) offered the idea of bringing pupils to the "threshold of worship" and this has had significant influence because it seemed to offer a more open approach. Webster (1990, 151ff) gives a helpful description of "five key models which embody society's understanding of school worship." These are the "Traditional Christian" model which sees the natural world as an expression of the creativity of God, the role of the school as nurturing children into faith and the format of worship is closely based on that of the Church; the "Modified Christian" model which affirms the underlying theological stance of the traditional model, but casts its worship in a modern idiom - more varied and 'relevant'; the "Inter-Faith" model which "helps world faiths to meet with sympathy so that a genuine attempt can be made to understand each other's thinking and practice" and assumes that each has some grasp of religious truth; the "Secularized" model which sees religion as "one thread of living among many", as "a matter of private belief" that has "no authority outside its own realm", and regards reason

as "sovereign" and as the "arbiter in all affairs"; and the "Other Faiths" model which seeks to allow the different faiths to speak on their own terms. After discussing the relative merits of these models and their legality after the 1988 ERA he concludes that none of them is adequate for what he calls "a post-Christian technological society", and he suggests that a new "radical" approach is needed which he sees as more in keeping with the times. This model emphasises "search and doubt", fosters "questioning and critical thought", accepts "uncertainty" and tolerates "ambiguity". He says "there is a model for worship here which dignifies that quest whose context is not a joyous celebration of faith but a wrestling with demanding ideas . . . . This is a model which is honest about that oscillation between doubt and belief faced by those who have faith and those who do not" (p.158). Webster does not give his model a name, but we might call it the 'wrestling questing' model. The sheer variety of Webster's models shows the tumult in agreeing an adequate basis for school worship - a tumult which is reflected in my data. An important question for my study (to which I shall return in chapter 8) is whether or not any of Webster's models fit the patterns of school worship in my sample because each of them entails different understandings of the nature of the 'truth' of religious belief.

The strength of feeling against collective worship which occurred in the interviews was not really reflected in the school policy documents, possibly because the schools did not wish to use such a vehicle for challenging the law of the land. The policies tended to deal with the problem of worship by stressing the importance of an open, individual response to what was offered - and this usually took the form of silent reflection - as described in the last chapter. A less publicly available staff discussion document described the problematic nature of collective worship more directly, "School Worship is a confused and contentious issue and at [school H2] we have managed, it could be argued, sensibly to shelve the thorny question until more weighty issues in the curriculum have been dealt with." (H2).

The official government and LEA documents indicated that whilst there was considerable consensus on the desirability of core values and a common moral code, the question of worship was much more problematic and divisive. The 1944 Education Act [sections 9(3)(b)&(c)] contains the right of withdrawal from worship. The 1988 ERA adds the possibility of a school seeking a 'determination' to release it from the requirement that the collective worship shall be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" [section 12]; and also the instruction that the character of the collective worship shall take into account the family backgrounds of the pupils [section 7.(5)(a)].

There were many comments from other official documents which showed how uneasy schools were with the requirement for worship. The summary of OFSTED reports for Luton high schools for 1993-97 said that, "Many schools do not fulfil the requirements for a daily collective act of worship." (Luton Education Committee 1997, 3); and that, "Three-quarters of schools do not meet the legal requirements for collective worship" (p.12). This reflected the national picture. The 'Analysis of SACRE Reports for 1997' commented, "The general picture is very much a repetition of previous years. Nearly all primary schools provide daily acts of collective worship for their pupils. . . . In secondary schools, on the other hand, 80 per cent or more were regularly failing to comply . . . ." (SCAA 1997, 9). The Bedfordshire 'Collective Worship' booklet commented that "there is a great deal of unease and uncertainty among teachers about the nature and purpose of collective worship in school." (Bedfordshire Education Service 1989, 1).

There is a curious ambivalence and awkwardness about collective worship in the official documents. It is required for all pupils by law and yet the documents acknowledge the difficulties in meeting this requirement. It is recognised that the worship is not corporate (i.e. a body of people with similar beliefs), but collective (i.e a gathering of people where nothing can be assumed in terms of beliefs - there may be a complete mixture). Circular 1/94 (DFE 1994, paragraph 57) says, "Worship in schools will necessarily be of a different character from worship amongst a group with beliefs in common. The

legislation reflects this difference in referring to 'collective worship' rather than 'corporate worship.'" This ambivalence and awkwardness can be seen in the discussion of the meaning of collective worship. The primary legislation (i.e. Acts of Parliament) does not define worship. Both Circular 1/94 (paragraphs 57, 61 and 63) and the OFSTED Inspection Handbook (1995b, 87) have controversially tried to push this definition in the direction of a traditional understanding of theistic worship which also accords "a special status to Jesus Christ" - as described in chapter two. These directives, which many see as the result of political pressure at national level from a right wing Conservative - Christian lobby, go against the attempts in other official documents deliberately to broaden the concept of worship in order to make it incorporate a wide variety of beliefs and attitudes, religious or otherwise. For example, the Bedfordshire 'Collective Worship' booklet says:

> One way forward might be to broaden the defintion of the word "worship". Worship can be defined as having to do with "worth" and "honour". It should be concerned with identifying, affirming and celebrating certain ideals and values held to be of central importance to the community which worships. This is a useful definition as it accommodates a variety of practices. (Bedfordshire Education Service 1989, 4)

Similarly, the Bedfordshire 'Guidelines for Writing a School Collective Worship Policy' (Bedfordshire Education Service 1995) urge that worship should be "understood in a broad sense"; and the Luton 'Focus: Collective Worship' (Luton MERC 1997, 15-17) describes the legal requirements and then comments:

> School acts of worship . . . may be a time of honouring excellence and exploring and sharing things of value and worth (the "broad" definition . . .). But during such acts of worship pupils should be given an opportunity to worship inwardly (the "specific" definition . . .). This may be achieved through a moment or two of reflective silence during each act of collective worship. This will, therefore, allow a meaningful experience for all pupils whilst giving time for individuals to worship in the spiritual sense.

This last rather contorted quotation reveals the difficulties of providing a framework for collective worship in which all can participate given the variety of views and beliefs which are prevalent in most schools today. Some of the documents try to ease the problems by stressing the importance of "reflection," "stillness," and "exploring beliefs" (e.g. Bedforshire Education Service 1989, 1; Luton MERC 1997, 16).

The statistics on observing collective worship in secondary schools show that these attempts to broaden the concept of worship to make it more widely acceptable have not been entirely successful, although it remains an interesting question as to why a large majority of primary schools still observe collective worship. The official documents show a considerable ambivalence and unease with the whole idea of collective worship: whereas there was a consensus in these documents on the idea of core values and that these were non-negotiable for pupils as to whether or not they chose to abide by them, there was no similar consensus in the area of worship and religious belief. Many of the documents assumed that this was a private matter and pupils would and should make their own choices and it is no business of the school to encourage them in any particular direction - in this respect these documents conflict with the legal requirement for school worship to be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character."

Worship "in any sort of direction"

Some teachers, especially those from the county high schools, would like the requirement for worship to go, but many also felt that something indefinable and intangible would be lost and the whole activity impoverished as a result of such an action. Several teachers struggled to define what precisely was meant by worship in this context as the following comments reveal: "I don't really know what worship is. . . . What is worship to me is something totally different to somebody else." (J3.3.3); "I'm not really sure exactly what's meant by worship at the moment - my own personal confusion" (cJ1.4.2).

In order to deal with the problematic nature of worship in a school context many teachers and schools gave their own definition of what collective worship involved. As we have already noted the primary legislation does not define the term; the only attempts to do so occur controversially in Circular 1/94 and the OFSTED Inspection Handbook (1995b & 1995c). It has been widely observed that collective worship is 'sui generis' and therefore it lends itself to such redefinition, especially given the problems facing teachers in a plural context. Broadly speaking there were ***four different directions*** in which the teachers

looked - each of which can be characterised using phrases from the interviews. In order of increasing emphasis on 'transcendence' these were: firstly, an "act of collective responsibility" (P1.3.3) which focused on moral values; secondly, a "corporate act of thinking" (H3.1.1) which stressed reflection and thinking on personal values, 'worth-ship' and developing a sense of awe and wonder; thirdly, an "act of spirituality that . . . is collective" (J2.1.11), which emphasised a vague inner dimension to human life which went beyond the material; and fourthly, "a true act of worship" (J4.1.3) involving a more traditional worship of God. Often a given individual teacher's view of assembly might contain elements of all four of these approaches. There was considerable variety concerning which element was the predominant one: this tended to depend on the teacher's own beliefs, the ethos of the school, and the age of the children. Each of these approaches will now be examined.

THE MORAL EMPHASIS - COLLECTIVE WORSHIP AS AN "ACT OF COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY"

Promoting moral sensitivity and moulding behaviour - "Heightening their awareness of the power of goodness"

This was the most prevalent direction in which the teachers turned in their attempts to re-shape collective worship.

In the interviews most teachers were quite prepared to admit to an agenda of promoting moral sensitivity via collective worship, and they did not seem to have any fundamental problems with doing this. This idea was very deep-rooted across all the interviews, regardless of the age and background of pupils, the type of school, or the beliefs and views of the teacher. In the infant and junior schools twenty three out of twenty four teachers stressed this and some did so very strongly. In the twenty four interviews this theme was mentioned one hundred and five times - a number far in excess of most other themes. A similar pattern occurred in the thirteen high school interviews where twelve teachers emphasised the moral side: the total number of comments being forty two. The

two teachers who did not stress this both focused on religious belief, but for different reasons: the junior school teacher was an evangelical Christian whose main emphasis was on giving the children some understanding of worship and the Christian faith; the high school teacher was a Muslim whose main concern was genuine freedom of religious expression.

There were several graphic illustrations in the interviews of the centrality of promoting moral sensitivity in pupils: "I think we are looking at the children heightening their awareness of the power of goodness . . . . I think with our mixed religions we're really looking at the power of goodness and trying to encourage the children to be aware of that, and how we can stimulate that in them." (J3.2.11); "I do believe that we should be encouraging social and moral behaviour" (P1.1.4); "I would think of it more as a moral context, and an opportunity to get them to think about how they are and how they should be and how they relate to each other." (I2.1.7).

Sometimes the teachers seemed to view the school as a moral oasis in an increasingly immoral society. For example a primary school teacher said the main aim of her assemblies was "to teach the children good Christian values, ... particularly in a society where things are breaking down so rapidly; quite possibly the only set of values a child meets that are reasonable values could well be those that it meets at school." (P1.1.2). A junior school headteacher said, "We've got to build some sort of social cohesion. . . . I think it's more important than it's ever been now because we see society in so many ways breaking up . . . in the new millenium there are going to be even fewer shared rules, shared values than there are now" (J1.1.3). One high school teacher spoke about assembly being an alternative (to the media and peer groups) influence on youngsters to give them different ideas about how they should live and behave. She tried, for example, to make them think about the amount of swearing which they did almost unconsciously. (H2.3.4).

All schools stressed the importance of 'school ethos' and a very important part of this was moral behaviour. Teachers tried to encourage particular types of behaviour within the school. One Church high school teacher commented, "Year 9 are horrible to one another most of the time. It's the worst age group, so we try to spend quite a bit of time on that." (cH1.3.6). Another high school teacher (H1.2) described assemblies as "the touchstone of our expectations" (p.3). He also commented on the assembly themes list saying "there's a very strong moral dimension to it" (p.5). He described the aim of his assembly as "presenting working together as the morally correct thing to do" (p.5) and he spoke of using Holy Books to make "non-denominational moral points" which seemed to indicate a belief in a free-floating or tradition-free morality which was universal (p.11).

For some teachers the moral dimension was seen as part of what was meant by worship. One Church of England junior school teacher, when asked about the meaning of worship in the school context, included "the idea of teaching them about the morals" in her understanding of worship (cJ1.4.11). An infant school teacher described her understanding of worship as "learning about God and telling the children about God and how we ought to behave towards each other, to appreciate each other" (I2.3.9). This teacher had a strong Christian faith, but clearly the moral aspect of assemblies was very important.

One primary school teacher (P1.3) was unequivocal about where the heart of his assemblies lay. He described his aims as "getting across to the children 'en masse' how to behave and how to live their lives" (p.2) and "trying to get them to realise the usual messages of being nice to each other, and being sensible" (p.3). The moral aspect was so central to this teacher's view of assembly that he wanted to describe it as "an act of collective responsibility with certain messages coming across" (p.3).

For a few teachers the decision to give assemblies a predominantly moral emphasis had not been easy. One high school teacher (H2.2) with a strong Christian background

described her "tremendous conscience searching" (p.3) when the 1988 Education Act came in. Was this a "call from God" (p.3) for her to lead assemblies in a much more explicitly Christian and worshipful way? In the end she said, "I went down the line . . . of actually a more moral approach" (p.3). She spoke of "triggering off in one child, or a lot of children, some care and concern" (p.5). Part of her aim was the encourage the children "to have some moral sense" (p.6).

This strong emphasis on moral development also occurred in the school policy documents. In all the county high schools there was much talk of shared values. In every case this commonality was seen in terms of general moral values and primarily concerned with behaviour. A guideline in one school (H1) said emphatically that, "The *thought for the day* will be based upon general moral values and have no foundation or affiliation with any religion." Another policy (H3) described assembly as "providing a time to expose and reflect upon common values, including moral values." The infant and junior school policies all saw the teaching of moral values as central to assembly. This was usually commented upon in OFSTED reports. The phrase 'school values' occurred frequently indicating that the school was effectively the arbiter of morality, at least within their own confines. One school (J2) spoke of "the absolute values of the school." Another policy (I1) declared with almost evangelical fervour that in assembly "the values and ideals we share are proclaimed."

There is a clear sense here of the school as a moral community whose task is to nurture children into the commonly accepted values of that community. Gill (1992), Sacks (1991) and MacIntyre (1988) have all stressed the importance of the community in the moral formation of the young. Durkheim (1915) argued that religion played a crucial role in creating the moral community and that with its demise society would need a functional equivalent. His comments on education, referred to in chapter four, indicate that he thought this could play an important part in the moral formation of the young. Schools are one of the few 'communities' in present day society which embrace all people (or

almost all). As such they are given the impossible task of not only promoting moral values, but also deciding what those values should be - at least in so far as they are required to declare their 'shared values' in their prospectuses. The difficulties of this task are compounded by the fact that schools are only 'partial' communities - pupils also belong to families, peer groups and other social communities - and therefore their influence over pupils is much diminished. It is also compounded by the very diversity of the pupils' backgrounds in many schools.

The assemblies which were observed bore out the strong trend to focus on morality rather than worship or religious belief. The vast majority of the county high school assemblies were to do with personal behaviour and attitudes, self-development or school ethos. There was virtually nothing which could be labelled 'worship' other than some perfunctory short silences for reflection, and scarcely any direct mention of religious belief. The Catholic high school was noticeably different and this will be examined in a later section.

In the infant and junior school assemblies there was more apparent mention of religious belief and use of Holy Books. However, this was misleading because, as with the high schools, most of the assemblies were about behaviour and morals. The difference was that the infant and junior schools used biblical and other stories to illustrate these themes, but it was done in such a way as to be quite clear that the driving theme was the moral message rather than the biblical story. On the whole, when teachers made use of Holy Books in collective worship, the main thing was to find a story which illustrated the point (usually moral) which the teacher wanted to make, and the story's provenance did not matter. Some comments from the interviews illustrate this very well. One teacher was asked directly, "Does it particularly matter where the story comes from as long as it illustrates the point?" She answered, "No, I don't think so" (J4.1.8). Another teacher said her criteria for using material from the Bible was if it was "appropriate to the theme, not just reading the Bible for reading's sake" (H3.2.10). A junior school headteacher

said, "I don't care where it comes from as long as it's a good story. It's got to be illustrative. It's got to be important. It's got to be one that I'm comfortable with" (J3.1.9). Similar comments are widespread in the interviews.

A common ethical code across all beliefs? - "The principles of mankind"

Often there seemed to be an assumption that there was a commonly agreed code of behaviour (the "principles of mankind" as one teacher (cJ1.1.6) put it) which could be talked about in assembly. Ten out of twenty four infant and junior teachers, and five out of thirteen high school teachers mentioned this specifically in the interviews. This moral code had two main characteristics for my sample teachers. Firstly, it was something which cut right across the religions (and therefore was much easier to handle in the context of assembly than religious beliefs which seemed so different and divisive at times); secondly, it was absolute and non-negotiable.

Several comments, which are typical of many from the interviews, illustrate the belief that a common moral code exists across all religions and beliefs: "the way we behave is the same in lots of religions, isn't it? We all aim to be kind to each other, to look after each other, to respect each other, not to be horrible and nasty, to live together." (I2.3.11); "the different values that we have are very much alike. Everybody has got the same sort of values" (J3.3.11). A junior school teacher suggested that it was all a case of "bringing it down basically to the major commandments" (J3.2.11). In a similar vein a C.of E. junior school teacher (cJ1.1.) spoke of "basic, good caring principles" (p.4) and of "the principles of mankind" (p.6). She added later, "I think all religions teach man to care for man, basically, and I think most religions teach man to care for God, and beyond that I think I wouldn't go" (p.12). Another teacher at the same school (cJ1.4) talked about the "special values we all hold", and added, "to be a good person we have to have these values" (p.7). She said later, "a lot of the morals are very common to all of the religions so that is something else that can be brought in as a common strand" (pp.15-16). A Catholic high school teacher spoke about "a common moral code" (p.11) and commented

that "people have come to the same conclusion world-wide in these areas, therefore it must be best to deal with each other in this way. . . . it's not just following one way - these people have thought this out for centuries and have come to similar conclusions" (pp.12-13).

Many other comments illustrated the ***absolute, non-negotiable*** aspect of this moral code which the teachers considered it to have. One high school teacher (H1.2) agreed that he was trying to encourage pupils into particular ways of thinking and behaving which he described as "ways of behaving that we see as some kind of intrinsic good" (p.6). He later expressed his view that most people believed that there is "some kind of moral touchstone . . . that is external to themselves" (p.14). An infant school teacher described some views, e.g. racist, as "totally unacceptable" (I2.3.14).

There seemed to be a widespread belief in a 'free-floating' Kantian moral imperative to which all reasonable people will agree. As mentioned above one high school teacher (H1.2) spoke of making "non-denominational moral points." In this view that there are certain non-negotiable norms, which it is the school's duty to establish, the teachers are reflecting a common theme in the debate on 'values education'. Some (e.g. Halstead 1996, 24) point to the argument from a position of liberal education that there are some moral values "about which liberalism can never be neutral." He argues that liberalism depends essentially on three basic values: "individual liberty", "equality of respect for all individuals", and "consistent rationality" (p.18), and that "the central strands of liberal education may be best understood in terms of the liberal framework of values outlined . . . ." (p.23). Without these values the edifices of liberalism and of education both fall. McLaughlin (1995b, 25) argues in a similar manner that there are certain values which "could be seriously disputed only by a person who is in some sense outside the moral realm . . . . They are shared values . . . they are not matters for reasonable and civilised dispute. . . . They constitute an important check on a tendency to relativistic thinking in morality."

Warnock (1996, 45ff) has argued that values have an "intrinsically shared nature" because "humans are in many important respects alike." She challenges a totally relativist view of values which treats them as personal opinions and points to the "very high degree of moral consensus in the case of . . . classroom virtues" (p.51). Society, she argues, has a duty to transmit these shared values. The teachers in my sample were doing just this.

Others find grounds for non-negotiable norms in an appeal to a 'higher authority' - either in religious form or some moral philosophy which seeks to explain why the rules should be binding. An example of the former is Sacks (1995); Kant would be an example of the latter. Lewis (1943) gives an interesting defence of the existence of objective value or the "Tao". He argues that if we deny the existence of the "Tao" then all value is lost and each person or group is free to fashion their own 'values' in whatever way they wish. Educationally this means that attitudes inculcated in the young are the arbitrary decisions of their educators and education becomes propaganda. Either we accept the "Tao" as an axiom or we allow ourselves to be driven in any arbitrary direction. The teachers in my sample did not believe that the basic moral framework they put forward was simply their own personal preference - it had an objective quality.

Those arguing from a liberal position also point to a large area of morality in which legitimate disagreement is possible. In this domain the schools responsibility is to make children aware of this diversity, and give them the ability to think rationally in order to make their own free decisions. However this is a complex task as McLaughlin (1995a) has pointed out if it is to do justice to all the subtleties of the situation and not slide into relativism. This theme will be developed in chapter eight.

The official documents - shaping tomorrow's citizens?

The main interviews suggested that schools were much more comfortable in dealing with moral issues in collective worship than with religious beliefs. In the former area it seemed to be assumed that there was a basic moral code on which most, if not all people agreed,

and therefore could be promoted with some confidence. In the latter area the sheer variety of deeply held beliefs was deeply problematic to handle in the context of collective worship. There seemed to be a moral absolutism at work alongside a religious relativism. Is this in any way reflected in the official documents and, if so, what form does it take?

There was a strong emphasis on the importance of the school in spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. This is enshrined in the core legislation of the 1988 ERA, section 1.(2):

> The curriculum for a maintained school satisfies the requirements of this section if it is a balanced and broadly based curriculum which -
> (a) promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society; and
> (b) prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

Sir Ron Dearing, in the foreword to the SCAA (1995a) 'Discussion paper no. 3', says "schools, in partnership with parents, can make a distinctive contribution through the process of education to the moral and spiritual growth of our children." This idea is continued in the SCAA 'Discussion paper no. 6' which says, "Spiritual and moral development are indispensable aspects of education for adult life." (SCAA 1996a, 5) Later it states that, "Delegates agreed that spiritual and moral dimensions must be central to school policy and permeate all school activities and all subjects in the curriculum." (p.13).

The official documents seem to take it for granted that spiritual and moral education are a legitimate part of the schools' business. Governments have always tended to see schools as places of moral instruction, and for this to be a principal role for collective worship and Religious Education. In the 1944 Education Act this was built around Christian concepts as British society was much more homogeneous at that time. In today's context the need for moral values is no less acute, but it is more difficult to find a commonly agreed basis. Nevertheless, the official government documents indicate a determination to find one.

There was a pervasive assumption, which at times seemed like a pioneering crusade, that the schools should promote certain basic values as central to their whole activity and being. There was a tremendous stress on developing a school ethos, with certain shared or core values. Circular 1/94 says:

> The set of shared values which a school promotes . . . will make an important contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development and should be at the heart of every school's educational and pastoral policy and practice. Every attempt should be made to publicise the school's values to parents and the local community and to win support for them. . . .
> . . . The Government has recently required schools to include in their prospectuses a statement of their ethos or shared values.
> (DFE 1994 paragraphs 2&3)

Discussion of 'shared values' is widespread in the government and local authority publications - notably the important 1996 National Forum/SCAA 'Consultation on Values in Education and the Community' (already described in chapters two and four) which suggested a *de facto* set of moral values which commanded wide agreement and so could serve as a basis for an individual school's moral education; and the OFSTED inspection schedule (1995b and c, section 5.3) which requires inspectors to make judgements about the extent to which the school "teaches the principles which distinguish right from wrong" - it seems to assume that schools will know what those principles are. The mere fact that these initiatives occurred showed that some people at least thought that the pursuit of an agreed statement on moral values might be successful. Phrases such as 'socially acceptable values', 'core values', 'a basic moral template' all indicate this central concept which was very widespread in the documentation.

The OFSTED discussion paper provides a fuller commentary on moral development (OFSTED 1994b, 10ff.). It raises some key questions: "whether there are moral absolutes and, if so, whence these can be derived?"; "What values?"; and "Whose values?" It refers to the National Curriculum Council document, 'Spiritual and Moral Development' (April 1993, republished by SCAA in 1995). This put forward a framework of moral values. The OFSTED (1994b, 12) discussion paper conclusion was, "There is, it seems, at least a reasonable basis of consensus on what constitutes the core

of desired moral values and behaviour, irrespective of ethical theory." This reinforces the conclusion that there is a '*de facto*' agreement about moral values, but no agreement about the source and authority of those values.

One channel taken by the official documents in the direction of moral education is the promotion of the concept of citizenship - as already outlined in chapters two and four. Successive governments have tended to use schools in general, and religious education and collective worship in particular as vehicles for moral education and the grooming of 'good' citizens. With the decline of the influence of the Christian faith and the advent of a plural and postmodern society new ways have to be found to give a theoretical basis to this aim. Citizenship education is one such attempt. There is a growing literature in this area (e.g. Beck 1998), but whether or not it will give any more than a basis for a minimal moral consensus in a plural society remains to be seen.

There is little room for doubt that both in the teachers' views and practices and in the official policy literature the moral shaping of children is seen as a central role of the school. It is assumed that there is an uncontentious core of moral values into which it is both acceptable and desirable for children to be inducted by common schools.

THREE 'RE-DEFINITIONS' OF SCHOOL WORSHIP

As well as the tactic of focusing on moral education, the schools in my sample adopted three other approaches to school worship to avoid its problematic nature. The first two of these tried to re-define worship in order to make it a more widely acceptable activity (one of these centred on the idea of reflection, the other on the concept of spirituality). The third approach sought to promote a more traditional, theistic view of worship.

Collective worship as a "corporate act of thinking"

This approach attempted to avoid many of the problems associated with worship by focusing on individual reflection and thought. As one high school teacher explained:

> I feel uneasy about them [acts of collective worship] because of the requirement that it should largely be an act of Christian worship and in an increasingly multi-faith society that doesn't seem to me to be entirely appropriate. I do think there are some ways round that and I think it is possible to construct an assembly where an act of thinking, a corporate act of thinking can take place. (H3.1.1)

He goes on to describe the inward and individual nature of this activity:

> So we are, in a way, redefining worship in terms of inside of yourself - think and if you wish to give something or someone in relation to that thought what you think they are worth in terms of God or whoever, then internally that is something you can do. Although you may be corporately standing there, collectively standing there, you can make that an individual act if you wish to do so. (H3.1.2)

Such a "corporate act of thinking" might involve ***asking the basic questions of human existence***. As one junior school teacher put it: "In a small way it's a drip-feed of why we are here, what we are doing, how can we be better people? . . . The worship would be a question . . . it might be the raising of an issue" (J3.1.1/2). This reflects the views of Hughes and Collins (1996, 8) who say, "Collective worship is a spiritual occasion essentially a time for pupils and staff to reflect upon questions concerning ultimate reality and the search for meaning and purpose in life"; and also of Webster (1990, 158) who suggests, "Perhaps schools will find it helpful to see worship as a pondering of those great questions which shape humanity."

A "corporate act of thinking" might also involve ***encouraging reflection***: "it's the time for reflection" (I2.2.4); "I think it is important to give them a chance to sit and think" (J3.3.2); "I think there is a place for children to be quiet . . . just to have space to think about things other than work" (H3.2.2); "I view it as a time for a group of people to get together and be reflective" (H3.3.9); "the only time probably that many of them get to be at all reflective. I think that's a big need, a big need" (cH1.3.7). It is important to note that the term 'reflection' was not defined by the teachers. Its very vagueness was a considerable help because this allowed multiple interpretations. McCreery (1993, 28-29) sees reflection as an important component in collective worship; in particular it can provide "a moment of calm among the hustle and bustle" and "a time to reflect on wider

issues." Sometimes worship in this 'thinking' sense meant encouraging the development of ***awe and wonder*** : "the last one I did was the awe and wonder bit" (I2.2.5); "the marvel of creation, sometimes they are appreciative of that - that is worship in a sense" (J2.3.4).

Some teachers tried to expand the idea of worship to mean ***'worth-ship'*** - i.e. reflecting upon things of ultimate worth or value: "if you want to take worship in its broadest sense - worth, something that's worth - then, I think, maybe an assembly . . . is trying to put over a challenging message with something of worth, in the very broadest sense" (H2.1.10); "I think as well worship is looking at things that are worthy, things that they should perhaps try to attain and set as goals, values for themselves." (H3.2.3). The 'worth-ship' approach is widely supported as described in chapter two (e.g. Gent 1989; Hughes and Collins 1996, 7; Webster 1995, 50ff; McCreery 1993, 26ff).

There were several other aspects of this way of looking at worship as a "corporate act of thinking". These included: ***an educational event to inform the mind*** - exploring beliefs, extending awareness and understanding of different ways of seeing the world - "introduce them to something that maybe they haven't thought about" (H2.1.4); ***a social/community gathering*** - "there is a value in just being a community together" (H2.1.3), "the children tend to take assemblies as a social gathering rather than a religious gathering" (P1.3.2); ***a celebration of achievement*** - "its a celebration of good work" (I2.3.2); and ***part of the ethos and ritual of the school*** - putting across a moral message or challenge.

The essential thing about this approach is that it involves no commitment to any particular religous belief. It could, therefore, be seen as being profoundly secular in view and so fall into Webster's "secularised model" of collective worship which changes the emphasis "from the divine to the human" (Webster 1995, 52).

Collective worship as an "act of spirituality that . . . is collective"

As described in chapters two and five, the term 'spiritual' was introduced in the 1944 Education Act. The 1988 ERA [section 1.(2)(a)] makes the "spiritual development" of children a clear responsibility of the school and OFSTED have been required to inspect this aspect of school life. Webster (1995, 90) comments that "spiritual is a multi-textured word with a long history and many layers of meaning . . . ." This quality has led some teachers and educationalists to place it at the centre of their understanding of collective worship.

In the interviews it was mentioned by seven out of twenty four infant and junior school teachers, and by four out of thirteen high school teachers. One infant teacher spoke of developing "a little bit of spirituality within the child" (I2.2.4); a junior teacher described assemblies as "thinking about spiritual abstractions" (J1.1.1). This concept had the advantage that it could be interpreted in both a religious and a non-religious way. As one junior school teacher put it:

> I think worship is only possible if you have in your own mind that there is something there to be worshipped. If you haven't got that concept then worship as such is meaningless. Spirituality is that other dimension within us all and I believe you can develop that even in people who might not formally say, "I believe that there is a God" . . . I think even people who do not believe that or whose concept of God is very under-developed will also be, if you could bring it out, . . . aware of something inside us which you and I would call spiritual. (J2.1.3)

For this teacher, who had a developed idea of spirituality, the term involved, as well as the inward and universal character described above, "a sense of awe and wonder, a sense of what a wonderful world we're in, a sense that there is more to life than life, a sense of the transcendental, this sort of thing" (p.4). Another teacher described her understanding of the spiritual by saying, "I try . . . to get across the idea that there is a world beyond the material where there are essential and eternal verities in the light of which we are very small fry." (J1.1.2).

For some teachers the idea of the spiritual was interpreted in a religious sense. For example: "the children realise that there is a spiritual side . . . that there is something inside them that is separate that needs to be addressed. . . . I think that the bit God deals with is the spiritual" (J2.2.3).

The idea of spirituality seemed to appeal to some high school teachers as a more acceptable framework for assembly. One such teacher commented, "we do all have a sense of spirituality." The elements he included in his understanding of this concept were: "some kind of moral touchstone" that "is external" to ourselves; "that we have a responsibility to protect the world for generations to come but that is external to me, it is self-less and it is not self-centred"; "something which is guiding me to think about the way in which I live my life"; and a sense of "awe and wonder" (H1.2.13,14). This is very close to what a theist might call God, only put in different language. Another high school teacher spoke of her understanding of the idea of the spiritual which contained many similar themes:

> Dealing with things that are not material, in the sense of spiritual, things of the spirit, enlarging their understanding that there are more things in the world to care about than just being alive and working. It's about the emotions and feelings and values, and recognizing that there is something else to life than just living. . . . [The] feeling of humanity, being human, having needs and recognizing the needs of others, that there is unity among human beings; that there is an appreciation of things like beauty, art and music and those things; things that are dealing with feelings of the spirit rather than a very materialistic world that young people in particular feel is the most important thing. (H2.1.3)

The school policies also invariably included the notion of spiritual development. However, this was not dealt with in any depth - there were no attempts other than cursory ones to explain what the term might mean. It was usually combined with moral, social and cultural development and where this happened the emphasis was mostly on common and personal values and the development of personal beliefs. In OFSTED reports the criterion most frequently used to measure spiritual development was the perceived adequacy of the acts of collective worship. An OFSTED report in 1998 said that the

spiritual and cultural development in one high school (H3) was not satisfactory - this was largely because "form time does not include an act of collective worship."

All the infant and junior policies wanted to contribute to the personal development of the children - spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC). Frequently the concept of spiritual development was seen as something which transcended all beliefs. One school's SMSC policy (J2) stated:

> Spiritual development . . . transcends the potential barriers of religious and cultural difference. . . . spiritual growth is not dependent on a child having a secure faith background. . . . Spiritual development relates to that aspect of inner life through which pupils acquire insights into their personal existence which are of enduring worth. It is characterised by reflection, the attribution of meaning to experience, valuing a non-material dimension to life, and intimations of an enduring reality. 'Spiritual' is not synonymous with 'religious';

This school's collective worship policy spoke of its aim "to make periods of Collective Worship 'special times', with a distinctly spiritual atmosphere." Part of this aim was to "feed the spirit." The above quotation includes the definition of 'spiritual' offered by OFSTED (1994b) in a discussion paper as, "that aspect of inner life through which pupils acquire insights into their personal existence which are of enduring worth." This was used by several schools.

The notion of spiritual development was used in all the county high schools as a common factor for all pupils, regardless of beliefs. One school (H1) defined 'spiritual' as "inner self." Another (H3) said "the potential for spiritual development is open to everyone and is not confined to the development of religious beliefs."

It is worth noting at this point that the Catholic school made very little use of the term 'spiritual' in its documents. This was largely because it had a very well developed and specific Catholic understanding which did not need to use such a vague and universal term. I will return to this when I consider the Catholic school in detail. This does, however, raise the question of whether the notion of a tradition-less spirituality is a valid one, and if so, how it is to be understood.

The notion of spirituality was also present in the government and local authority documents. Some official documents use the idea of the 'spiritual' as an umbrella term to cover moral, religious and other world-views. The SCAA 'Discussion paper no. 3' says:

> The Education Reform Act refers to a dimension of human existence which is termed the 'spiritual' and which applies to all pupils. The potential for spiritual development is open to everyone and is not confined to the development of religious beliefs or conversion to a particular faith. (SCAA 1995a, 3)

The Luton document 'Focus: Collective Worship' (Luton MERC 1997, 2) quotes the OFSTED definition of spiritual which says, "Spiritual development relates to that aspect of inner life through which pupils acquire insights into their personal life which are of enduring worth . . . . 'spiritual' is not synonymous with 'religious'". It also speaks of acts of worship becoming "a purposeful collective spiritual experience." (p.15) Although there has been a considerable amount of discussion of this concept in the official documents (e.g. SCAA 'Discussion papers nos. 3 & 6') it remains rather vague and elusive. It is certainly defined in a sense which is primarily individualistic - e.g. "The essential factor in cultivating spirituality is reflection and learning from one's experience" (SCAA 1996a, 7). It is an area which schools find more difficult to handle than moral development. The Luton summary of OFSTED reports 1993-97 says, "The provision for spiritual and cultural development is less secure [than for moral development]. . . . Whilst in some schools and in some subjects pupils' spiritual development is enhanced through the curriculum this is not firmly rooted in all schools and there are examples of missed opportunities." (Luton Education Committee 1997, 6) This reflects the national picture where "pupils' spiritual development remains problematic for most schools" (HMCI report on Standards and Quality in Education 1995/6).

This discussion of the use of the concept of 'spirituality' has some important points for our study - notably that it is seen as ***personal, inward and subjective and yet is a universal feature of human experience***. There has been a growing body of opinion among educationalists which has seen this as the way to provide a sound basis for collective worship. Hull (1995) suggests that:

> The set of complex problems facing us will yield to a simple solution: repeal of Section 7 of the Education Reform Act 1988. . . . The expression 'collective worship' should be removed and replaced by 'collective spirituality'. The amended law would require pupils to take part in acts of collective spirituality whose main purpose would be to make a contribution to the spiritual development of the pupils and the school. Problems, controversies and misunderstandings associated with collective worship would disappear, and schools would be provided with a powerful vehicle for promoting spirituality. (Hull 1995, 35)

Priestley (1996) noted the resurgence of interest in the 'spiritual' aspect of education. He argues that this is a reaction to a narrow rationalist and functionalist view of education. The concept of 'spirituality' offers the possibility of a broader vision. He gives some general descriptions of what such a concept might entail (broader than religious, dynamic, to do with being and becoming, other worldly, communal, holistic), but warns against defining it too tightly.

There are several other publications (e.g. Hay with Nye 1998; Hughes and Collins 1996, chapter 5; Brown and Furlong 1996; Webster 1995, chapter 5) on spirituality suggesting that many see this as a basis for schools and beyond for dealing with the vexed question of plural beliefs in general and collective worship in particular. Part of its attraction is its emphasis on process (spiritual development) rather than end product (particular moral views or faith commitments) as Erricker (1998, 51) has pointed out. Grimmitt (1994) has suggested that religious communities need to share in "a wider common identity." He challenges the division between educational values (openness, scepticism, rationality) and religious values and suggests that we need to generate a "spiritual consciousness" and a framework of "universal spiritual values" (p.142).

Collective worship as a "true act of worship"

There were still many teachers in my sample who wished to keep a traditional religious understanding of worship (i.e. a lifting of the heart and soul to God) in their notion of collective worship. Although there had been no definition of worship in the 1988 ERA, the subsequent Circular 1/94 (paragraph 57) and the OFSTED Inspection Schedules (1995b and 1995c) had made a theistic understanding more central, as explained in

chapter two. Although no previous government had attempted such a definition and it was deeply controversial, my data suggests that there is considerable sympathy for some such view amongst my sample of teachers, although some would take the opposite standpoint. One infant teacher described their Friday "triers' assembly" in the following way, "I feel it's a nothing assembly. It's a celebration of good work, but I feel there's no content. . . . there's no act of worship there at all" (I2.3.2). The desire for what one teacher described as a "true act of worship" is also revealed in the following quotations from infant and junior teachers: "I prefer the idea of thinking there is 'Something Else'. . . and there is 'Something' that we need to acknowledge, and so that acknowledgement there is 'Something Else' that comes into worship." (J3.1.1); "to give them an awareness of a God" (I2.1.4); "It gives them the idea that there is somebody up there bigger than them" (P1.3.7). These comments reveal a clear desire to see collective worship within a theistic, or deistic framework - perhaps akin to Webster's 'exploratory Christian model' which "takes note of that hue within the spectrum of Christian belief which affirms a questioning and exploratory faith" (Webster 1995, 41). It can take the form of a vague, general theism: there was an open-ness, even in the C.of E. school, about the nature of the God who was being worshipped. As one teacher said, "We do try to get across to the children that it is an act of worship. And at the same time we don't particularly specify a particular belief or a particular God because with the different children in the school it could be different for each person" (cJ1.4.11).

There is also a moral dimension to this view as the following comments reveal: collective worship involves "either a moral kind of implicit Christianity . . . or trying to encourage them to work their best and look for the good things. And then I always say a prayer and I feel that . . . it's a religious thing, it's not secular, that doing our best is not something we just do as a secular thing, that God has a part to play" (J2.2.2); "it's learning about God . . . . and telling the children about God, and how we ought to behave towards each other, to appreciate each other." (I2.3.9)

The situation in the high schools was rather different as nothing like traditional worship occurred. One teacher said, "collective worship to me is coming together in whatever size group and focusing on God, and that's why I don't feel what we do in assembly is the same thing at all. It really isn't." (H2.2.11). Another teacher from the same school commented, "I get a little bit of Christ in as I can, and God and things. . . . Just a little smattering." (H2.3.3). This teacher was very conscious not to overdo the religious aspect and agreed with the previous comment that what goes on in her school was not really worship (p.9). The high schools were operating almost entirely within Webster's 'secularized model' of collective worship.

EXCEPTIONS AND ANOMALIES

There were at least two interesting exceptions and anomalies - the Catholic school which had a strong sense of its basic identity as a "worshipping community"; and the major difference between the county high schools (where virtually no 'worship' occurred) and the infant and junior schools (where a considerable amount took place).

The Catholic school

The interviews showed that in the Catholic school there was a very strong sense of ethos and identity with a pattern of worship which was firmly Catholic which infused the whole school - as described in chapters four and five. Their approach fell somewhere between Webster's 'traditional Christian' and 'modified Christian' models of collective worship.

The pattern of worship was not so markedly Christian in the Church of England school, which was both a 'neighbourhood school' and a church school. Their approach was more akin to Webster's 'exploratory Christian model' described above (Webster 1995, 41ff).

The division between the high schools and the infant and junior schools

There were few clues in the data as to why the expression of religious belief (via prayers, songs and subject matter) was so much more prevalent in the infant and junior schools. The following are merely conjectures for consideration.

It may be that the religious and spiritual identity of the pupils is more formed by the time they are in high school and so the diversity is more of an issue. Children in infant and junior school are more amenable to nurture and formation.

It may be that the teachers in high schools are not so sympathetic to the claims of religion or its place in the education system.

It may be connected with the scale of the school. In a primary school all the children can be gathered every day in the one hall without much difficulty. Therefore the sense of community and togetherness is very strong. The historical tradition of collective worship has meant that this activity expresses the community identity. Arguably in an increasingly diverse society this worship is becoming a less and less satisfactory vehicle for the expression of that identity, but it is still a significant factor. In the high schools it is not possible to gather all the pupils in one hall because of the numbers, and their sense of being one school community is not so dependent on the activity of assembly, although year group assemblies can be important in establishing a sense of belonging and identity as noted in chapter four.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

The data described so far in this chapter have several implications for the understanding of religious belief which underlies collective worship. These implications are supported by further data from the interviews and documents, and from the teacher questionnaire. In brief, the view of religious belief which underlies collective worship is one that sees it as:

marginalised; private and individual; subjective; plural and relative; having a common core. These will now be looked at in turn.

Religious belief as marginalised

The very strong emphasis of many, if not most, teachers on moral messages and personal development meant that matters of worship and religious belief were often marginalised. This was particularly so in the county high schools. In the observed assemblies over one third of the infant and junior ones and just over half of the county high school ones contained no direct reference to religious belief. When religious belief was mentioned in the county high schools it was always in the form, "Christians believe . . ." or similar. Over half of all the assemblies made no use of 'Holy Books'. There were no prayers or hymn singing at all in the county high schools. In these schools most pupils only had one assembly per week - the rest of the time collective worship was supposed to occur in tutor time, but rarely did.

The SCAA 'Discussion paper no. 6' referred to "the marginalisation of collective worship" (SCAA 1996a, 14). This suggested that there was a consensus on the idea of core values and that these were non-negotiable for pupils as to whether or not they chose to abide by them, but there was no similar consensus in the area of worship and religious belief. The OFSTED review of secondary schools (1993 -1997) confirmed that this is a national trend. It said:

> In general, . . . spiritual development, and in particular the requirement for a collective act of worship, has been ignored by many schools. . . .
>
> This very widespread non-compliance raises questions about the Act and its interpretation, and in particular whether schools in a broadly secular society can or should bring their pupils together in order to engage in worship. (OFSTED 1998a, 58)

In contrast with this sorry state of affairs regarding worship the report said, "In only a small minority of schools is provision for pupils' moral development judged to be unsatisfactory." (p.59). We should also note that this report did not include its comments

about collective worship among the summary of 'main findings' despite the obviously deeply unsatisfactory state of affairs - this can be taken as further evidence of the desire to marginalise worship and religious belief in assemblies.

The strong moral emphasis under the umbrella of collective worship could lead to the view that religious beliefs are really disguised moral intentions - the view of Braithwaite (1971) as described in chapter one. In a similar vein has been the use of school assemblies by governments as a vehicle for the moral education of children. In 1944 there was a strong overlap between this and Christian belief. In today's plural society this is no longer so, leaving a 'free-standing' moral emphasis in assemblies - giving further support to the idea that morality is the essential core of religious belief.

This marginalisation of worship and religious belief in school assemblies (which can be seen as a 'semi-public' context) can be taken as evidence of the continuing privatisation of religious belief and the increasing secularisation of the public arena - two of the trends described in chapter one. There is considerable concern in this respect from various perspectives. For example, Halstead and Khan-Cheema (1987, 29), writing from a Muslim position, have drawn attention to the need to ensure that "children are not picking up the hidden message that religion is not important." The evangelical Christian organisation CARE has expressed the need to encourage the implementation of the current law, including the provision of the experience of Christian worship, as any alternatives might lead to a "thoroughly secularized system" (CARE 1995).

Religious belief as private and individual

The basic approach to the assemblies (described above) which stressed the importance of personal reflection and the development of individual spirituality, beliefs and values implies a view that religious belief is a private and individual matter. In the interviews just under half of the teachers made a direct comment which saw religious belief in this way. The following quotations illustrate this: "bringing it down basically to the major

commandments, the belief in a god, whichever god is theirs. To quote Dave Allen, 'May your god go with you'. It's that kind of feeling that it is their god which is personal to them. . . . and offering worship to their own particular god, or perception of god, and also their regard and respect of other people" (J3.2.11/12); "I've said, 'whatever the name of your god, make up a prayer to your god'" (J4.2.10); "perhaps finding their own way of worshipping and what is right and true for them" (J4.2.13); "even if their god is not the same that I've got" (cJ1.3.5); "I would say religion is a personal thing" (P1.3.11); "we are, in a way, redefining worship in terms of inside of yourself . . . . an individual act" (H3.1.2); "it's a very personal thing when somebody follows a faith or not" (H3.2.4).

The personal and private nature of religious belief was further emphasised by the view of spirituality as essentially an inner affair (as described above).

A couple of comments from the teacher questionnaires revealed another approach which saw religious faith as something personal: "In taking assemblies I am aware of my views as a Jew. . . . My truth is my personal view not to be forced on others. To each person their truth is sacrosanct" (J3.1); "I have my own view of truth, but it is personal, not to be imposed on the children I teach" (I1.1).

This view of religious belief as private and individual has often been contested. Hardy (1982) identified the view which sees beliefs, religious doctrines and practices as "ways of interpreting and living in the world" as having become "a critical orthodoxy" in education. (p.110). He suggested that from a believer's point of view this was to misrepresent the nature of the belief. Religious traditions, he claimed, do not see themselves as only 'true for me' or 'true for us'; rather they are truths, not just truth claims. He says that the teaching process should acknowledge this i.e. that "the truth is at issue between these traditions" (p.117). Many others (e.g. Watson 1987, Wright 1993, Cooling 1994) have commented on the need to consider the matter of truth in religious beliefs more centrally in Religious Education generally - as described in chapter two.

Religious belief as subjective

Just over a quarter of the teachers interviewed made a direct comment which suggested that they saw religious belief as a subjective matter. Several drew attention to the difference between scientific or historical matters of fact and religious belief which was a matter of opinion. Concerning different creation myths, one primary teacher said, "There's no scientific answer to anything and if there's no scientific basis then it's down to your beliefs and, therefore, your set of beliefs are equally as valid as the next person's." (P1.1.11). Another church junior teacher compared historical knowledge and religious belief: "if you are saying historically this has been proven in an historical sense of truth that wouldn't be a problem, but regarding belief I think that would be a problem." (cJ1.1.14). Such a view is in line with the approach taken in the influential Schools' Council 'Working Paper No.36' (1971, 92) which said:

> Education presupposes a common basis of agreement about what constitutes knowledge and what is only opinion. At the present time Christianity, in the view of the majority, falls into the second category.

Since that time this confident assertion has been considerably challenged as making too sweeping a claim for science and empirical knowledge and too low a claim for areas such as morality, aesthetics and religion. For example, Cooling (1990, 35ff) argues that much science teaching leads to a "largely unquestioned acceptance of scientism as a world-view and the rejection of the importance of a sympathetic study of religion." This distinction between generally accepted fact and matters of opinion/faith was made in the Bedfordshire R.E Planning Guide which said that teachers do need "an appreciation of the differences between generally accepted facts and matters of opinion or faith." (Bedfordshire Education Service 1985c, 8) This rather naive distinction is questioned in the SCAA 'Discussion paper no. 6' (1996a, 13) which suggested that "erroneous ideas about science had resulted in naive realism and reductionism" which had led to religious knowledge being seen as unreliable in comparison with scientific knowledge. The paper suggests that a more balanced approach is needed which does not treat scientific knowledge in quite such a paradigmatic way.

Some of the teachers' comments implied that the 'truth' of religious belief was determined by the individual's choice - i.e. a subjective matter. One primary teacher expressed this by saying "if you believe it, it is true" (P1.3.11). Another teacher said regarding her religious belief, "I would say it's the true one for me" (P1.2.14). There were several similar comments in the interviews. A similar line of thought implying that to some extent (and possibly entirely) beliefs and values are a matter of personal creation occurred in the Bedfordshire booklet 'Planning Primary R.E.' which says:

> Primary Religious Education seeks to give children a rich variety of experiences through which they can develop the skills, attitudes and knowledge to create their own beliefs and values in life. In primary education in general, and Religious Education in particular, we want to give our children "not the painting, but the paintbox". (Bedfordshire Education Service 1985b, 3)

This seems to reflect a postmodern attitude to religious belief - that they are a matter of individual choice and creation rather than a discovery of anything which might be termed 'truth'.

My questionnaire to the teachers whom I had interviewed asked about their views concerning the way they handled the question of the truth of religious belief in the context of collective worship. There was a small majority in favour of seeing this as meaningless and/or unimportant suggesting that they may be seeing religious belief in a non-cognitive manner. Of the twenty five answers, eleven agreed it was meaningless, six were neutral, and eight disagreed; eleven thought the issue of truth unimportant, four were neutral, and nine disagreed.

Religious belief as plural and relative

There were several comments which indicated that many teachers treated religious beliefs and other world views in a plural and relative manner - i.e. that there are many different, equally valid ways of looking at the world, each carrying its own criteria of truth and reality (see Byrne's definition of relativism in chapter one). In the interviews sixteen out of twenty four infant and junior teachers, and seven out of thirteen high school teachers, made direct comments which implied that they saw religious belief in such a way. Some

of these teachers did not hold relativist views on a personal basis, but the way they operated in the context of collective worship was to treat religious belief in such a manner. The following quotations all illustrate this relativist tendency: "I think they are all different ways" (J3.1.11); "you can't deny the existence of other religions because they are all valid . . . . They are all ways people acknowledge what's going on in the world." (J3.1.12); "So you have your own beliefs and someone else has a different belief, a different way of looking at it. But both are equally right, both are equally valid." (cJ1.4.14); "it's important to show there is parity" (J3.2.6); "other pupils may have just as valid a point of view which isn't necessarily exactly the same" (H3.3.12). One teacher used an interesting metaphor to describe this situation which implies an almost arbitrary choice between religious beliefs. She said, "I would always preach that everyone is different, we don't all support the same football team" (P1.2.14).

Another very frequent practice of the teachers which could be interpreted in a plural and relativist way was the use of the formula 'Christians believe. . .', or 'Hindus believe . . .' In the interviews nineteen out of twenty four infant and junior teachers and all nine county high school teachers said they normally used this formula or something like it. The following comments are typical of many: "I would say, 'this is what the Christians believe' and, 'this is what the Muslims believe'" (I2.2.10); "The way it works in this school - the Christians do the Christian assembly and they just explain their beliefs" (H1.3.8).

Usually a descriptive approach was taken which left the children with the knowledge that there are different beliefs, but with no way of assessing between them. There was a pronounced desire to avoid making evaluative judgements on religious beliefs and even more so when it came to the question of the 'truth' of these beliefs. Many teachers simply said they would not make such comments. For example: "I don't think it's for me to say you are wrong" (I2.3.13); "I will say, 'I don't know, what do you think?'" (J3.3.13); "It's not our job to tell you, you must make up your own mind" (P1.3.11); "who am I to judge? I am not in a position to compare and contrast and evaluate between them. I just

don't have enough knowledge in order to do that" (H1.2.16). Interestingly, this last comment seemed to suggest that it might be possible, in principle, to make evaluative comments. It was lack of knowledge which prevented the teacher from doing so. Other teachers seemed to believe it was simply not possible in principle to make evaluations.

Two particularly interesting comments came from Catholic teachers who also seemed to want to avoid evaluative comments. Concerning different religions one teacher said, "I would never presume to say one thing was better that another . . . . because the time factor is against it really and I don't particularly feel that's my role as a form tutor." (cH1.4.6). The other teacher commented:

> We can only seek to go the best way for us, and we can't assume that everybody else's way is wrong. We might wish to encourage others to take our way because we've found that it provides some answers and it provides guidance on how to live your life, and hope for the future . . . . Other people have found different ways of doing that and while we may . . . say I couldn't go along with that way . . . it doesn't mean that I think we can say that these people are definitely wrong - we've got the truth and they haven't - because that's a presumption that none of us can really make. (cH1.2.12)

This comment seems to lean in a more pluralist and relativist direction than the official 'inclusivist' line of Roman Catholic teaching which stresses that whilst truth may be found in other faiths, the final truth is to be found in Christianity (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council 1966).

The teacher questionnaire gave further evidence that religious belief was being seen in a pluralist and relativist manner by a majority of teachers. Thirteen out of twenty six replies thought that the different religious faiths were all true in their own way, seven were neutral on this and only six disagreed. When asked whether some views contain more truth than others, nine out of twenty four agreed, six were neutral and nine disagreed.

Several important educational documents seem to work on relativist assumptions. The Swann Report (1985, 473) said that all religious communities in this country had the right

to expect the education system to treat their faiths as "valid belief systems in their own right." As an ethical statement about respect for people this is incontestable; but there is the danger that it can change in status to an epistemological claim of a relativist nature. Watson (1987, 27) has argued that there are many unexamined assumptions in education among which is relativism. She concedes that this is important because it draws attention to the context in which beliefs are held, but complains that this is often done at "the price of taking seriously the search for truth." She suggests that "this relativist assumption is extremely persuasive and subtly damaging to education; it inhibits any in-depth discussion of the values necessary to education by assuming from the start that they are subjective and just a matter of consensus" (p. 28).

A common core to all religions?

The interviews suggested that many teachers believed that there was a firm common core to all religious beliefs - 'essentialism' in Byrne's typology of religious belief as outlined in chapter one. This was particularly pronounced in the infant and junior teachers where eighteen out of twenty four expressed such views and made a total of forty two comments on the matter. Their positive views in this may have been affected by the very strong desire to have a united school. The high school teachers were not so marked in believing there was a common core: only six out of thirteen mentioned this.

This approach was in line with some of the local authority documents, many of which encouraged schools to look for common themes between faiths. The Luton 'Focus: Collective Worship' suggests that "leaders may wish to concentrate on those characteristics which are shared by faiths as well as those which are specific to Christianity." (Luton MERC 1997, 15). The Bedfordshire booklet 'Collective Worship' says, "Many . . . themes are also common to other faiths. In a school with pupils from a number of different faiths there will be many opportunities to select themes which are shared by Christian and other religious traditions." (Bedfordshire Education Service

1989, 5) This can also lead to something akin to Byrne's 'syncretism' as described in chapter one.

The nature of the common core took different forms: for most it was a common moral code; for others it was a basic human experience of the mystery of life and the search for answers. Most saw the different religions as pointing to a common truth, although some would only take this so far and believed that their own faith was, in some sense, superior to others. I have already discussed the ideas of a common moral code and a universal spirituality. The comments here will be confined to the idea of different faiths pointing to a common truth, albeit in various ways.

This belief was very widespread indeed through the interviews although it was slanted in different ways. For some teachers the different faiths were essentially ***pointing in the same direction***: "for me they all point to a common truth" (P1.1.10); "I think they are pointing to a common truth . . . I think we are all heading in the same way." (I2.1.12); "I think, probably, in their different ways they are all pointing towards the common truth" (cJ1.4.13). A variant on this suggests that the God is the same, but the methods of approach are genuinely different: "I do believe that they are praying to the same God, that they've just got different ways of doing it, but I do believe it's the same person" (H2.3.10); "you're going to God your way, you are following that path. . . . I value that they have a different vision" (H2.2 12). Interestingly, the chaplain at the Catholic school held such a view: "I suppose they're all going the same way, trying to find the truth. . . . I haven't any problem with any other religion and their way of finding the deepest, the ultimate reality" (cH1.1.10). Another teacher at the Catholic school used the metaphor of different people watching the same football match to express this idea: "if you talk to people after a football match you might get completely different views of the same game even though they were both standing there watching it. You can look at events and say people have got different views, but in the end the score was the same - you can't alter the score. So I tend to look at it rather like that." (cH1.3.12). This reflects Hick's realist,

pluralist interpretation of religion (as described in chapter one) which sees the great world traditions as constituting "different conceptions and perceptions of, and responses to, the Real from within the different cultural ways of being human" (Hick 1989, 375-376).

On other occasions it was suggested that all religions had a ***core of essential beliefs which was the same across the religions***: "there are always a common truth, a common whatever you call this central spiritual, for me, God" (H2.2.12); "Centrally, love God, love your neighbour, that is absolutely essential. . . . I've got no problems [with that] as a central faith of mankind." (cJ1.1.15); "there must be some sort of commonality . . . that you can hang your hat on" (cH1.3.11); several teachers used the metaphor of a "common thread" to describe this view - e.g. "isn't it fascinating that different people in different places they all really believe the same thing and that common thread I find particularly fascinating." (I1.3.10). This last comment merges into the next variant which suggests not only that the same God is there, but also that the differences in belief are only superficial - the ***underlying meanings are the same***: "One of the things I do right at the beginning of the year is to say to the children what we call God is up to us. . . . we mean the same thing, we mean something that looks after us" (J3.1.2); "Well, the children have said to me, the God is the same God. . . . so we all come under that one umbrella, I suppose." (I2.2.9); "whatever God it is, or whatever way you get there . . . it doesn't matter if you have got slight differences, you're all the same. . . . We are all the same" (P1.3.9); "if you look at Islam and Christianity, for example, it's almost the same religion" (H1.3.7).

At other times it was the ***'de facto' common ground*** which was stressed: "there are a lot of broadly Christian stories that also belong to other religions or are similar." (J3.3.7); "I can draw threads from all the different religions because they all have so much in common" (I2.1.3). Some teachers would accept the idea of common ground or overlap, but maintained a more confessionalist view, usually in an inclusivist form (see Byrne's typology in chapter one). Nine out of twenty four questionnaire replies took the view that

some religious beliefs have more truth in them than others as the following comments show: "up to a point [a common moral code] it's common ground, but from there on I don't believe it's different routes to the same God." (J2.2.10); "my own Christian faith . . . I feel that that's right. I would have disagreements with the other religions. . . . I suppose when you believe one thing is right, it's difficult to use something else. . . . if I was selling a car . . . I wouldn't use someone else's advert for a different sort" (J2.3.10); "I find I can't believe the Muslim story [of Christmas], I think the Muslim stories are wrong, I think they are misguided . . . . But what I do believe is the intention is good." (J1.2.11). A junior school teacher who was both a Christian and a firm advocate of 'multicultural assemblies' said he fundamentally believed that the different faiths are all pointing in their various ways to a common truth, but also thought there were "great errors also", but despite this "God gets through very, very meaningfully, even through beliefs, sets of beliefs that I might consider to be incorrect or certainly imperfect because love is such and if there is a chink He gets through" (J2.1.6,13).

CONCLUSION

To summarise this theme concerning the heart of an assembly, it appeared that there was an ethical absolutism at work alongside a religious pluralism and relativism. Most teachers seemed happy to work with the idea that there was a common moral code across most, if not all beliefs, which was non-negotiable. When it came to religious beliefs these were treated in a much more relativist way. This was not just a practical pluralism which saw the plurality of beliefs as a matter of empirical fact (which is undeniable), but it was an epistemological pluralism which saw the different beliefs as equally valid.

The implications and meaning of this will be further analysed in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 7

THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS ON COLLECTIVE WORSHIP - "AN AWESOME REPONSIBILITY"

INTRODUCTION

It has become clear from my data that both the content and style of an assembly are influenced very substantially by the views and attitudes of the teacher leading it. It is their judgement which is by far the most important factor in determining what is done. In practice, it is vital that the teacher leading the assembly feels 'comfortable' with both its content and its format. All the teachers in my sample spoke of the influence of their own personal beliefs on the way in which they conducted assembly. Many of them were practising members of a faith (usually Christianity) and most had had a religious upbringing. All of them wanted to avoid the charge of indoctrination and were very aware that they should not abuse their position, and yet many acknowledged that what they did was deeply affected by their own basic beliefs.

The only other really significant factor was the teachers' understanding of their educational role and what it was appropriate for them to do with regard to the matter of religious belief in a school context. To some extent this understanding was expressed in school policies and the various guidelines for collective worship, but the influence of these was comparatively small when seen alongside the teachers' own personal and educational beliefs.

One junior school headteacher remarked that there was "a lot of personal leeway" (J1.1.16) in the way assemblies were conducted. The teachers had tremendous scope for designing and shaping what went on. This fact, when combined with the decisive influence of the teacher's own beliefs and background, meant that leading collective worship was, as one teacher put it, "an awesome responsibility" (J3.2.1). The teachers had a delicate balance to achieve between the influence of their "own baggage" and the requirements of the school and educational context. They also had to take into account

the interests and views of various other significant groups - notably the families of the pupils, the pupils themselves, the faith communities, the local authority and the government, and society at large. Given the confused, contentious and complex nature of collective worship in a plural and postmodern society this was a very difficult and subtle task.

As with all the main themes there were some exceptions and anomalies - the main ones were again the church schools, the Muslim teacher, and the wide disparity of practice between county high schools and the infant/junior schools.

This theme of 'teacher influence' has substantial impact on the understanding of religious belief underlying collective worship. The declining influence of Christianity as the agreed framework for school worship has meant that the spirituality of collective worship is now very susceptible to being moulded by the teachers' influence and the choices which they make about what is to be done.

These themes will now be explored in more detail.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE TEACHER'S OWN BACKGROUNDS, BELIEFS AND VALUES - "YOUR OWN BAGGAGE"

The teacher's beliefs and values

When asked in the interviews about the influences on their own approach to collective worship the vast majority spoke of their own beliefs, values and backgrounds: as one teacher put it, "it's your own baggage that's being brought to whatever you do really" (H2.3.6). This was mentioned two hundred and sixteen times in the thirty seven main interviews which indicates that this is a very dominant theme, far in excess of other possible influences such as the law (mentioned by only eleven teachers and usually to say it did not have much effect on what they did), school policy (mentioned by less than half the teachers), or collective worship guidelines from local authorities or faith groups (mentioned by only one teacher). The only other significant influences were their

understanding of their educational role and their appreciation of the children's interests and backgrounds.

The very strong influence of the teachers' beliefs and backgrounds fell into four main categories. Firstly, there were ***those whose religous beliefs shaped and informed what they did, but in an implicit manner*** - for example: "I think they [acts of collective worship] are a really necessary part of the school day - that's probably because of my own Christian beliefs" (J4.1.1); "it's background, partly from my background, partly from things that have happened to me. . . . My own very traditional Christian background because I went to a girls Christan grammar school" (J3.2.8); "I am a Jew, and it's part of me (J3.1.10), It does shape what I do" (J3.1.6); "My main influence, I suppose, is because I myself am a Christian" (J2.2.5); "I was brought up in a very strong Christian background . . . it's just something I do . . . . It's just something I believe in " (P1.2.5).

Secondly, there were ***those whose faith was a major and more explicit influence*** - for example: "Our own joy and our own faith means we really want to be encouraging others to live it too" (cH1.2.15); "Personally, as a Christian, wanting them to know what's in the Bible and to be aware of it . . . . my own desire for them to learn a bit more about God. . . . I want to bring God or Christianity or the Bible or Jesus in somewhere personally" (H3.2.6 & 7); "when I do an assembly, where I go in and say 'as a Christian I believe'. . . from a Christian point of view that is a witness, that's an outreach" (H2.2.6); "I think it is a duty for us to speak about God" (H2.3.12); "Obviously my own Christian faith has a big influence. . . . Obviously I believe what I know is true, is true for the children and can be of benefit to them" (J2.3.6).

Thirdly, there were ***those whose personal and moral values shaped what they did in collective worship*** - for example: "At the end of the day it's things that I personally believe are important for children to know because there's nothing written down. . . . It's really the things that I believe are important to them as developing children from my

beliefs." (I1.3.4); "I don't suppose it [the teacher's view of education] has got that much influence in as much as my personal values . . . I do believe that we should be encouraging social and moral behaviour and so I suppose they would underpin things more" (P1.1.4-5); "I more believe in people, in human nature, the kindness of others to other people" (J3.3.5); "I believe very much that consideration for other people, if you live by that, you shouldn't need any other rules" (cJ1.2.4); "I am interested in the moralistic side . . . so I suppose that does influence my assemblies. . . . I suppose I teach the children that there are special values that we all hold, to be a good person we have to have these values" (cJ1.4.7).

Fourthly, there were ***staff whose personal beliefs led them to be cautious or antagonistic towards collective worship in schools***: "Personally I don't go to church if I can help it . . . that's not because I'm anti-religious, it's just that personally I can't see the point. . . . I am prepared . . . to have an open mind" (P1.3.13); "Some of the staff here would not be very happy doing an assembly on their own because of their own beliefs" (P1.3.13); "if you were to say 'you must do it' [lead collective worship] then the majority of staff would probably refuse on conscientious grounds" (H2.1.3).

The teacher questionnaire revealed that the majority of those interviewed were practising members of a faith. Out of twenty eight replies, seventeen said they were practising Christians, one Jew, six either humanist or agnostic, and four said they had a nominal Christian outlook - defined in terms of moral behaviour rather than doctrinal beliefs. It is impossible to draw any general conclusion from this. A much wider survey would need to be done to determine whether this pattern - with a large proportion of those leading assemblies being practising Christians - is typical across all schools in England.

The teacher's upbringing

In the questionnaire twenty five out of twenty eight replies said they had had a Christian upbringing, one had had a Jewish upbringing, and two did not complete this section.

Some teachers had had a religious upbringing although as adults they were no longer practising members of a faith. Even so their upbringing still had an effect on what they do in school as the following quotations illustrate: "I am not a very religious person. I've been brought up as a Christian, I've been confirmed . . . . I used to go to Sunday School every week and Church twice a day on a Sunday, and my parents used to have grace when we had meals, and so it's instilled into you as a child" (I2.1.3/4); "I think of a theme I will take from my own background, particularly when I was at school" (P1.3.5). One agnostic teacher said, "I was brought up in a Christian family, both my parents are clergy, so I am very at home, and very comfortable with the whole business of praying collectively and preaching. So it always amazes me at how easily I can slip into the 'bow your heads' and 'say a little prayer', and so on" (H1.2.7). This same teacher described the main influences on the way he led assembly as "my own agnosticism" (p.3) and also "my background as an English teacher - my assemblies tend to rely on reading poetry and stories, and examples from history" (p.6/7).

This strong influence of a religious upbringing is potentially very important for the future of collective worship. Given the generally declining levels of Church going and Sunday School attendance, the generation of senior teachers who now lead collective worship are more likely to have had some kind of religious upbringing than the younger teachers who are following in their footsteps. The research of Francis (1987, 161ff) has suggested that, particularly in county schools, younger head teachers (those under forty) "are moving away from the characteristics of church-related education. For example, 38% of the younger headteachers in county schools describe the majority of their assemblies as largely secular and social, compared with only 9% of the older headteachers." (pp 164-5). More generally, the European Values Study 1981-1990 found that "only one in seven parents aged under 35 years believes that it is important to develop religious faith in children." (European Values Group 1992, 9). My own research sample is too small to confirm or deny these general trends, but it does indicate the substantial influence of their

religious upbringing on these particular teachers even if they no longer adhere to any particular faith. Those without such an upbringing are likely to do things differently.

The judgements and choices made by the teacher concerning collective worship

Given the "personal leeway" which teachers have concerning the content and style of collective worship, the choices they make are critical. My data suggested that they are often made on subjective grounds, are substantially influenced by uncertainty or lack of knowledge - particularly concerning faiths other than Christianity, and are very individual in character.

The teachers' subjective feelings and judgements.

All thirty seven main interviews contained many examples of subjective judgements - there were at least one hundred and ninety examples which makes this a very strong theme. In practice, it is vital that teachers feel 'comfortable' with what is being put across. This begs the question of how such judgements are made, but a high degree of subjectivity was involved as illustrated by the following quotations: "I sometimes feel a bit uncomfortable [about prayer in assemblies]" (J4.1.6); "I would want everyone to feel comfortable in assembly" (I2.3.6); "I just like singing and I like the hymns . . . I have favourites, . . . but I do try to get one on the theme . . . . I will often say, 'Sit up and sing and enjoy it and feel happy' because I feel like that" (J4.1.7,8); "I have got my favourites . . . . I like a lot of the old hymns" P1.3.7/8); "I don't find any discomfort with saying to them, 'pause and think about that'" (H2.2.6); "I would be quite happy . . . as long as I felt comfortable with the material" (H2.3.9); "it's a kind of gut feeling when you feel the school is ready for this and a lot of the assemblies I do, you work upon the way it's going and you can change the order of things" (J3.2.8); "I tend to deliver things that I am happy with, not things that I'm not happy with" (P1.1.5). One teacher said concerning talking about different religions, "I am comfortable in that role" (J3.3.4). The same teacher said she tended to do "what I enjoy doing myself . . . things which . . . touched me" (p.5) or "moved me in some way" (p.8).

Sometimes whether or not a teacher was 'comfortable' with a theme depended on their ***own religious beliefs***. For example, a Jewish teacher said, "I am quite happy, quite comfortable, if I have to do something on Christianity. It doesn't bother me, it never has done. I can very happily acknowledge Jesus - what I cannot acknowledge is the crucifixion. Obviously, that creates problems, so that I keep away from" (J3.1.1). The same teacher said, "What causes me a problem is because I am a practising Jew there are certain areas that I will not tackle. I won't tackle Easter and I won't tackle Christmas" (p.1); "I think it's better done by one of my Christian staff who likes doing it anyway" (p.11). Sometimes the discomfort was based on more ***subjective grounds***. One infant teacher was asked what criteria she would use to determine whether or not certain views were acceptable: she said, "I think I would have a feeling about it, wouldn't I?" (I2.3.14). At other times judgements seemed to be made on the basis of ***a combination of the teacher's beliefs and subjective feelings***. One teacher said, "I've found it quite difficult to deal with the way some of the cultures in our community treat their women, and their daughters in particular" (I2.2.11). Another commented on the choice of assembly subject by saying, "people tend to do it round their interests they feel comfortable with" (H2.3.3).

Lack of knowledge and expertise

Many teachers felt constrained in what they could do because of their own lack of knowledge and expertise in different religions. Such comments were very widespread - appearing in twenty nine out of thirty seven of the interviews. The following are typical: "I don't understand enough about it." (cJ1.1.8); "As far as our multicultural resources are concerned we don't have as much as we ought to have" (P1.1.8); "there's a great danger you can pretend you know things you don't" (J3.1.6); "I don't use the Koran very much because I don't know my way around it" (J3.1.9); "I do often use stories from the Bible. I'm not very good at them from elsewhere . . . I'm less familiar with them and I hate to work from notes" (J2.2.9); "I use those [stories] mainly from the Bible because that's where my knowledge lies" (H2.2.10); "my depth of knowledge about all these things is far too shallow to make any evaluative judgement" (H1.2.16); "It's knowledge really I

know more Christian prayers" (H3.2.9); "I don't have much knowledge, I suppose, of other faiths" (J2.3.10).

There was little institutional desire to do much to address this issue. Out of twenty eight questionnaire replies, twenty had received no training at all for leading collective worship, three had been on one course, and only five had been on more than one course. This reflected the national position - the SCAA 'Discussion Paper No. 6' reported "concern at the exclusion of spiritual and moral development, PSE and citizenship education from initial and continuing professional training." (SCAA 1996a, 17). Similar concern and a call for better provision of training appeared in the CJEPC statement on collective worship in schools (CJEPC 1995, section 7).

Teacher uncertainties, dilemmas and confusions

Sometimes the teachers were constrained by their own uncertainties, dilemmas, and confusions. They often used qualifying words such as 'maybe', 'perhaps', 'probably', 'I suppose'. Several teachers openly admitted that they found some of the issues very difficult to handle and simply did not know what to think or do. Occasionally this was because the ***concepts were problematic***. For example: "I honestly don't know what worship is" (J3.3.3); "I'm really not sure exactly what is meant by 'worship' at the moment - my own personal confusion" (cJ1.4.2). At other times it was because ***the teacher was uncertain about their personal beliefs***. For example: "This is going to sound awful at my age, but I am not actually sure about my own beliefs, I think I am still trying to sort them out" (J3.3.5); "I have a very genuine conflict within myself about that [whether different religions and world-views point to a common truth]" (HI.2.14). At yet other times it was because ***teachers had not really considered issues before***. One experienced teacher, when asked whether she thought worship was appropriate in today's school setting replied, "I have never, ever considered it before" (H2.2.5). Another high school deputy head said, "Now I honestly don't know. I can't say I have sat down and

really thought deeply about whether we are all searching for a common truth or not. I suppose in a sense we are" (H1.2.15).

Development of teachers' view.

Several teachers showed that their views were developing and changing as a result of their experience in leading collective worship. This was a complex area in which many were finding their way and were prepared to learn. One infant school (I2) had changed it's introductory formula to prayer from 'Hands together and eyes closed' to 'Get ready for prayer'. This was the result of a visit by a Muslim father who had described prayer in the Muslim faith. Again concerning prayer, a junior school teacher said, "Up until maybe two years ago I would say 'Let us pray', and then I re-thought the whole thing - 'if you want to pray you can do'" (J3.3.8). One teacher told of how she had been deeply influenced by the assemblies led by the headteacher of her former school - "at my last school the head there was a very strong Christian and I don't think I've ever met anybody who does such wonderful assemblies . . . . she certainly did a lot for my spiritual development . . . . for my professional development . . . it helped me see the importance of that time of worship." (I2.2.3). One high school teacher was struggling with the concept of prayer. He had considerable problems if it was understood in the conventional way of being addressed to a divine being, but could accept the idea of "internal communication with ourselves, internal communication with one's sense of moral values" (H1.2.10). He could see a situation in which the concept of prayer could be broadened to include both aspects. Another high school teacher (H2.2) spoke of her tremendous conscience searching over the 1988 Education Reform Act. Initially she had been very fired up about it, seeing it as a call from God to be much more explicitly Christian in her approach to assemblies. Having thought about it, however, she came to a different conclusion. To push Christianity would be intrinsically unfair in a multi-faith environment. So she went down the route of emphasising moral themes. All these examples provide evidence that the teachers were developing new ideas and ways of coping with the complex issues of collective worship in the semi-public plural context of the school assembly.

Individual styles

It was often acknowledged that the teachers had very different personal styles of leading assemblies and this had a significant effect on what was done. For example: "I've been doing it for so long, in a way, it's become part of the way I operate. . . . When I started doing this, way back a long time ago before I was a head, I found it very daunting and I did question what we were doing. It's now become part of me" (J3.1.1); "I've developed, I think, my own style . . . . you've got to be yourself" (J3.1.5); "Obviously, we've all got our own ways of taking assembly" (J3.2.2). Sometimes this individuality substantially affects the religious emphasis in the assembly - for example: "I say more religious prayers than somebody else" (I2.3.5); "Some members of staff will actually have a prayer and it's entirely up to the person who's leading the assembly" (H2.1.7); "when we do Christmas it's left very much to the person, usually the heads of year, it's very much up to them to do it" (H2.1.11). The content and style are significantly influenced by the teacher's individual knowledge, expertise and interests: "[X] does a lot of multi-faith assemblies . . . . He knows a lot more about it than most of us" (J2.3.4); "they get different opinions from different members of staff depending on who is taking it" (J2.3.11); "it [the content and message of the assembly] depends on who is actually taking it" (H2.3.3); "any number of people having the same 'Thought for the week' can come up with so many different ideas within that. It really depends on your interests and knowledge" (H3.3.9).

"A lot of personal leeway"

Several teachers commented on the fact that, despite the legal requirements, there was enormous scope for the teacher to determine both the content and the style of collective worship. As one teacher put it there was "a lot of personal leeway" (J1.1.16). An infant teacher commented that in her school "there's nothing written down" as to what should be dealt with in assembly (I1.3.4). A high school teacher said, "I have this philosophy that you can pick any theme out of the air and you can build something round it. I really do believe that" (H2.1.6). This last quotation neatly sums up just how much the content

of an assembly can be the construction of the individual teacher rather than a delivery of the ideas of an 'external tradition' - religious or otherwise. The teacher is relatively free, in postmodern fashion, to pick and choose ideas from wherever he wills and combine them in whatever way he wants. When preparing assemblies it tends to be the teacher's personal thoughts, ideas and experience which are the dominant factor in what is eventually done as the following quotations illustrate: "if it's something direct from my experience then I am quite at ease to share it" (P1.1.6); "I brought in a lot of things that belonged to my grandfather . . . . [I] will always try to use my things" (J3.1.7,9-10); "the way I prepare for most things - I tend to think about it a lot. . . . I just like to, sort of, keep things floating around in my mind and collecting little bits, little thoughts" (J2.2.7); "I just use my own knowledge - sometimes look in books" (H1.3.10); "I looked up the theme and I went through my own music repetoire . . . and I went through all the thoughts I could think of with 'Seeing the light' and various other practical analogies, and took it from there" (P1.3.6).

This dominance and authority of the individual teacher over any individual tradition is further illustrated by ***the way many teachers tended to use stories from Holy Books or elsewhere to illustrate a theme which they had already decided upon***. For example: "As time goes on you've got a store of anecdotes, stories, tales that you can elaborate and twist" (J3.2.7); "I've twisted it [a story], contrived it to my own needs at the time" (J3.2.5); "I don't care where it comes from as long as it's a good story. It's got to be illustrative. It's got to be important. It's got to be one I'm comfortable with." (J3.1.9); "I embroidered it . . . . I use any source and develop it" (J3.3.8); "I tend to use my own" [assembly material] (cH1.2.9); "I tend to have quite an eclectic body of information . . . and draw it all into one" (cH1.3.8).

More evidence of this dominance is provided by the frequent use of ***weekly themes*** as a basis for assemblies. The origin of these themes seems to be a mixture of the religious and national calendar, events in the school and in the country/world, ideas from assembly

books, plus a heavy contribution from the teacher personally. They are a truly postmodern, eclectic mixture with no external authority to commend them other than the fact that they are, in some sense, sanctioned by the school which is putting these thoughts before their pupils as worthy of consideration. It is often the work of a single teacher to decide on these themes which gives that person very considerable power over what is thought about. The following quotations illustrate these ideas: "When I draw up the rotas I do so with a pile of assembly books and I just look through for ideas" (P1.1.5); "It's put on the wall every Monday and that is what the assembly is based around for that week" (H3.3.2); "there is a theme which is school wide and is set for us, which in practical terms is incredibly useful . . . . [X] sets the themes at the moment" (H2.2.6); "one of my little jobs is doing the 'Thought for the week' . . . so I suppose I decide the themes" (H3.2.6); "I suggest the themes. I produce a rota, produce a booklet with the themes in it . . . also I am available for people to come and say, 'how can I approach this theme?'" (H2.1.1). The vast majority of these themes were of a general moral or personal development character. One school policy (H2) said that:

> The use of themes is intended to give real structure and purpose to the assembly programme, and to reflect the beliefs and values of the school and society in general. Although a number of the themes will be of a mainly Christian character the nature of the topics allows for other religious and non-religious stances to be acknowledged and explored. This is particularly important as the school contains students and staff from other faith backgrounds as well as those with no faith background at all.

Another policy (H1) stated that the thought for the day was "based upon general moral values" and had "no foundation or affiliation with any religion." The primary school policy said that "themes are chosen to give an opportunity for thinking about values important to the school community, for reflection, for focusing on local and national occasions and for celebrating special occasions, particularly festivals from all the world faiths." All of these policies indicate that the only authority these themes have is that they are deemed to reflect generally accepted values in society.

The use of themes is widespread in schools and there is much advice on how to generate them, most of which reflects the comments above. For example, the 'Redbridge Assembly Bulletin' (Autumn 1997) contained some criteria for a good theme:

- it invites reflection - that is, it opens up the spiritual and matters of worth and value
- it is 'multidimensional' - that is it is capable of being developed in a range of ways
- it is attractively worded - through being alliterative or puzzling, for example
- it is relevant - that is it connects with an aspect of the school, local, national or international scene . . .
- it is appropriate - that is it can be understood by pupils at the school and does not compromise the school's philosophy and approach to assembly/collective worship. (Gent 1997, 17)

(See appendix thirteen for examples of weekly themes).

This "personal leeway" and the consequent power of the teacher to decide what goes into an assembly recalls Disraeli's prediction at the time of the 1870 Education Act which for the first time made teachers in state schools responsible for religious education rather than functionaries of the Church. When addressing Parliament Disraeli said of this change, "You are inventing and establishing a new sacerdotal class. The schoolmaster, who will exercise their function, will exercise an extraordinary influence upon the history of England and upon the conduct of Englishmen." (quoted by Loosemore 1965, 339 - from Hansard, 3rd series, ccii, 289).

THE WIDER INFLUENCES AND CONTEXTS

As well as the teachers there were several other groups with an interest in collective worship and, to some extent, these vied with each other for power and influence. These groups included the governors, the parents, the pupils, the faith communities, the professional teachers organisations (e.g. unions, PCFRE, CEM), local authorities and government. My initial survey suggested that the influence of parents and governors was relatively small apart from the fact that teachers took the cultural background of the children into account when leading collective worship as described in chapter five. The guidelines produced by professional teachers' organisations, the faith communities and the

local authorities were hardly referred to at all in the interviews and I take this as evidence that they had relatively little significance for the teachers other than to give a general framework of broad principles. In this section I shall focus on the two most important influences upon the teachers - that is, the immediate school context and the 'official' framework established by parliament and the local authorities.

The school context

There were four main aspects of the school context which influenced the way teachers handled religious belief in collective worship: the underlying educational philosophy (usually liberal in character); other teachers, notably the headteacher and Senior Management Team (SMT); the school ethos and tradition; and the practicalities such as available space and preparation time.

The underlying educational philosophy

Most of the teachers seemed to be working within a liberal educational philosophy which stressed the importance of the freedom of the individual, open and critical rationality, objective knowledge, and religious belief as belonging to the 'private' domain. I have described the evidence for this claim and given an analysis of it in previous chapters, but we should note again at this stage that this is a substantial influence on the teachers' approach regardless of their own personal beliefs.

The influence of the other teachers

The headteacher and the Senior Management Team

Some of the infant and junior schools had quite distinctive approaches to collective worship and often this was due to the influence of the headteacher or occasionally other teachers. One infant school (I1) described itself as a "community school in celebration" and put great emphasis on celebrating the diversity of faiths within the school community. This was a particular approach which the headteacher had developed over the years. Another junior school (J2) had a weekly "multifaith" assembly which was always led by

the same experienced teacher who took great pride in the way it was done and saw it as a central part of his contribution to the school. He said, "it's given me, in my final years of teaching, a great deal of pleasure. . . . it's made my teaching much more colourful and much more meaningful to me" (J2.1.6). In another junior school (J3) there was a very strong emphasis on not indoctrinating and they had gone through the hymnbook to ensure that the children were singing appropriate songs. In the primary school the emphasis tended to be on inculcating the children into "good Christian values" - the headteacher here was more at home with the moral side of collective worship. In one of the high schools (H1) with almost entirely Muslim pupils, the approach was clearly within the liberal mould of the senior teachers. It was this school that was determined not to root its "thought for the day" in any religious belief or worldview. In another high school (H2) the issue of collective worship was effectively sidelined under the influence of the headteacher's and other teachers' attitudes and the person responsible felt under-resourced for the task she had been given. In all these school the approach taken by the headteacher and the SMT had a substantial impact on the way assemblies were done.

This concurs with the research of Francis (1987, 161ff) on primary schools who found that, "The impact of the headteachers' personal religious practices on the church-related character of county schools is considerable." Amongst other factors it affected the amount of contact with clergy and local churches, and the proportion of assemblies which were explicitly Christian.

The OFSTED report on 'Religious Education and Collective Worship 1992-1993' gave futher evidence of the influence on collective worship of a relatively small number of senior teachers. It revealed that in primary schools assemblies were mostly led by senior staff and volunteer teachers and in secondary schools by the Senior Management Team. (OFSTED 1994a, 31-33).

There is nothing new in the power of the headteacher to influence what goes on in collective worship. In a questionnaire survey of seventy-nine headteachers of primary schools in Birmingham in the early 1970s, "great variety of approach and content was found" (Brimer 1972, 8).

Other colleagues

A few of those interviewed mentioned their awareness of the views of their colleagues. Often this had the effect of making them cautious about the expression of belief for fear of causing offence or possibly exposing themselves to criticism for indoctrination. One Muslim teacher said, "come to a school being a Muslim, O.K. you're a Muslim, but don't talk about it. . . . this is the attitude from the staff" (H1.3.8). Sometimes there was a feeling that other colleagues put up with assemblies, but only just. One junior school teacher commented, "not all staff are religious, for want of a better word, and wouldn't be happy to do a religious assembly, but they all sit in and are happy for it to go ahead" (J2.2.2). Another was aware that she had "a captive audience of your colleagues as well as the children" (J3.2.1). One high school teacher was aware of many staff opinions which were not sympathetic to collective worship: she said, "the staff have got various views on it as well, so I think it is difficult" (H2.3.3). When compared with other influences this was not a large one, possibly because those staff who where not sympathetic to collective worship saw it as marginal to school life.

The school ethos, tradition and policy

The most distinctive ethos with regard to collective worship belonged to the Catholic school, but the other schools also were affected to some extent by their self-image and understanding of their ethos. However, there was relatively little mention of this by teachers other than those responsible for drawing up the written policies on collective worship, suggesting that this was not a strong overt factor despite the declared intentions of several official documents. Circular 1/94 noted that, "The Government has recently required schools to include in their prospectuses a statement of their ethos or shared

values" (DFE 1994, paragraph 3) and that one of the aims of collective worship was to "promote a common ethos and shared values" (paragraph 50). The OFSTED review 'Secondary Education (1993 -1997)' commented that, "Assemblies are an important manifestation of the school's ethos and have the potential to make a significant contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development" (OFSTED 1998a, 57). The collective worship policy is one which schools now have to produce and this requirement gives further power to schools, leaving much to the discretion of the individual school. The Bedfordshire booklet on 'Collective Worship' said that, "Each school will need to produce a written policy statement for collective worship" (Bedfordshire Education Service 1989, 15). The Luton 'Focus: Collective Worship' encouraged heads and govenors to consider "the school's own interpretation of the term 'collective worship'" (Luton MERC 1997, 16). This seems to open the way for each school to have a different understanding of the government's legislation and to be arbiters in their own domain.

It is worth noting the ***context and method of the production of these policies*** in my sample schools as these attempt to make explicit each school's ethos and approach to collective worship. All my 'gatekeepers' were sent a short questionnaire (see appendix 11) which asked, 'By what process was the school policy on collective worship produced?' In particular they were asked who decided to produce a policy, who drafted it, who discussed it, and who authorised and approved it. The answers to these questions showed an interesting variety.

In the high schools the Senior Management Team (SMT) took the decision to produce a policy in all schools. It was drafted by a deputy head in two of the schools and by the person responsible for collective worship in the other two. There was considerable variety in the level of discussion. In one school it was only the R.E. co-ordinator and a deputy head; in another it was the Heads of Year, Pastoral Teams, and SMT; in another the process included the whole staff and the govenors. There was also considerable

variety in who authorised the policy. In one school it had not been properly authorised; in another the SMT and the govenors authorised it; in another the govenors only (who are the proper group to authorise such policies under the 1988 ERA).

In seven of the eight infant and junior schools it was the headteacher who decided to produce a collective worship policy - in the eighth it was the SMT. Four of the eight schools mentioned the legal requirement for a policy or an imminent OFSTED inspection, and two mentioned SACRE determination applications as the reason for producing a policy - i.e. the legal framework has had a considerable influence in this area. The policy was drafted by the headteacher in four of the schools and by the RE co-ordinator in the other four. It was discussed by the staff only in three schools, by the staff and govenors in three schools; and by the headteacher, deputy headteacher and govenors in the other two. It was approved by the staff and govenors in five schools; by the staff in one; and the remaining two schools had not yet formally approved the policies. In one school, with a very high number of Muslim children, the policy was written in a context of fear of mass withdrawals from collective worship by Muslim children in the aftermath of the 1988 ERA.

The overall picture is that the collective worship policy is the preserve of a very small number of teachers, either heads or senior teachers who have direct responsibility for overseeing it, or those who have a particular interest - usually RE or humanities teachers. The wording of the policies tends to be rather bland as they have to be authorised by governors or discussed by the staff as a whole and therefore those who draft them have an eye to what will be approved by this larger group. As a result the impact of these policies on the actual practice of collective worship is not that significant apart from those infant and junior schools where the person who has written the policy also delivers most of the assemblies, but this was comparatively rare.

This practical reality contrasts with the idealised advice about the making of policies given by, for example, Parsons (1995, 8) who suggests that a "wide consultation" is needed, and by Hughes and Collins (1996, 20) who say that "a school policy is not worth the paper it is written on unless it has had the involvement of all the school's stakeholders, i.e. staff, parents, pupils, governors, advisers, etc." A policy is only significant if it is put into practice.

There is much in the official documents to indicate that there are severe problems in both the planning and the practice of assemblies. The OFSTED report on 'Religious Education and Collective Worship 1992-1993' noted that in primary schools "the planning and recording of themes for worship were often weak", whilst in secondary schools pupils were often offered only one large group assembly per week, sometimes as a result of the inadequacy of the accommodation (OFSTED 1994a, 32-33). There was some evidence in the Bedfordshire 'Guidelines for Writing a School Collective Worship Policy' that this was being tightened up with requirements for much better planning. (Bedfordshire Education Service 1995, section 5).

Practicalities

There were many practical aspects of the school situation which affected what was done in assemblies. These included: the time teachers had for preparation - often quite limited; the space available - especially halls in high schools; the time given in the school day for assemblies; the resources e.g. music, artefacts, visual aids etc.; the fact that assemblies gave teachers valuable 'non-contact' time; and the important role of assemblies in disseminating information and notices around the school.

The significance of these factors lies in the schools' unwillingness to do much about them in order to achieve a better experience of collective worship. The implication is that collective worship (as opposed to assembly) is of marginal importance in many schools, especially the high schools.

The government and local authority context

Recognition of the influence of the teachers

The official documents acknowledge and to some extent affirm the fact that the views and attitudes of teachers are crucial in collective worship. The primary legislation gives headteachers in county schools the responsibility to oversee the implementation of collective worship and the power to decide whether or not to apply to SACRE for a determination (1988 ERA Section 12; Circular 1/94 paragraphs 68-81). With regard to other teachers, Circular 1/94 (paragraph 141) says, "Teachers play a crucial part in the moral and spiritual development of pupils and make a vital contribution to the ethos of the school." The influence of the class teacher is acknowedge in the OFSTED inspection schedule (OFSTED 1995b, 83). The SCAA 'Discussion paper No. 3' continues this theme when it says, "Individual teachers and other adults in schools transmit values to pupils consciously or unconsciously . . . . teachers . . . are often seen as role models." (SCAA 1995a, 8; see also SCAA 1996a, 11,13,16).

The SCAA documents also look at the issue of teacher confidence and competence to lead collective worship. The SCAA 'Discussion paper No. 6' commenting on spiritual and moral development said, "Some delegates believed that many teachers welcomed society's expectation that they should assist young people in their quest for values . . . . Others believed that these issues should be tackled only by teachers who feel confident and prepared to do so." (SCAA 1996a, 13). This paper also lamented the lack of professional training for spiritual and moral development (p.17). The 'Analysis of SACRE Reports for 1997' stated that, "In several cases, schools were said to be having difficulty in finding staff willing to conduct acts of worship. Some schools attempted to provide collective worship in form groups, but a significant number of teachers felt uncomfortable about participating and exercised their right to be exempted." (SCAA 1997, 9).

The influence of OFSTED inspections

Several of the schools in my sample said that they were producing collective worship policies and being more meticulous in keeping records of collective worship in response to forthcoming OFSTED inspections. Of all the tools of the government this seemed to be the most significant. In my interview with the Luton Education Authority Multicultural Adviser (on 8/1/98) he was at pains to emphasise the role of the local authority in helping schools to meet the OFSTED inspection criteria whilst at the same time arguing that these criteria and the basic legislation are unworkable. We should note that the high schools were not particularly concerned about their inability to comply with the law. In their view they had done all that could reasonably be expected.

The power to define school ethos

The most significant and interesting acknowledgement in the official documents of the influence of the teachers occurred in the encouragement given to schools to define their own ethos and core values. Circular 1/94 states clearly the government's aims:

> The set of shared values which a school promotes through the curriculum, through expectations governing the behaviour of pupils and staff and through day to day contact between them will make an important contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development and should be at the heart of every school's educational and pastoral policy and practice. Every attempt should be made to publicise the school's values to parents and the local community and to win support for them. . . .
> The Government has recently required schools to include in their prospectuses a statement of their ethos or shared values.
> (DFE Circular 1/94, paragraphs 2 and 3)

The SCAA 'Discussion paper No. 6' said "schools should seek to be explicit and coherent about the values that guide their practice. Teachers should actively plan the best way to communicate these values in the classroom." (SCAA 1996a, 11).

The government clearly wants the schools to play a role in the moral education of the nation's children and sees collective worship as one way of doing that. There are at least two contentious points in this. One is the link made between moral/values education and R.E. which is much disputed (e.g. Beck 1998, 57ff). The second point is the

encouragement given to schools to be the arbiters of values, and there seems to be an assumption that such a role goes far beyond establishing school rules for operation only within the confines of the school. The moral ethos of the school is in some sense related to the values of wider society. It is unclear from the government publications whether school ethos is to reflect or shape the values of the wider society. The 1996 SCAA 'National Forum' on values attempted to produce by consultation with a wide range of people and interest groups a set of values about which there was very broad '*de facto*' consensus to give schools a foundation on which to stand (as detailed in chapters two and six). This would seem to imply that schools should reflect the values of society. But the strong encouragement given to schools to promote their own ethos and values suggests that a shaping of society's values is also in the government's mind. But this all begs the question of the status of the school and the teachers (and indeed of the SCAA forum) in deciding on this ethos and these values. In one of my interviews an infant headteacher said that the school values "come from the truth as we all, as the colleagues who work together here, see it" (I1.1.7). Whether this should be so is a moot point. What is well established in both the official documents and my data is that the teachers are being given an increasingly important role in saying which values are to be promoted in schools.

EXCEPTIONS AND ANOMALIES

There are three main interesting cases in which the influence of the individual teacher seems to be less than paramount. The first is the conflict between the Muslim teacher and the prevailing liberal ethos in his school; the second is the strong ethos and tradition of the Catholic school; and the third is the substantial disparity in the 'religious' content of assemblies between the infant and junior schools on the one hand, and the county high schools on the other hand. All of these have been dealt with in previous chapters.

THE TEACHERS' INTEGRITY

The teachers faced a powerful tension in collective worship between their own beliefs and their role as educators. In this situation they have to be concerned both for the pupils' and for their own integrity. The former of these relates to the danger of indoctrination which I discussed in chapter five: here I will examine the issues mainly from the point of view of the teachers' own integrity.

The tension between the teacher's own beliefs and the public educational context

There was plenty of evidence in the interviews to suggest that teachers do make judgements and evaluations about different beliefs and views at a personal level. Some (I2.2, J2.1, cH1.2) disagreed profoundly with the Muslim attitude to women; others (e.g. H1.2) held agnostic or sceptical views about religious belief; others (J2.1, J2.2) were greatly concerned about the dangers of a relativist approach to belief; and yet others (J2.3, J1.1, H2.2, H2.3, H3.2) thought their own beliefs were in some sense the 'most true' or 'best' beliefs, not just for them personally, but generally.

In certain 'private' contexts (e.g. a church meeting or a discussion with friends) these teachers would have no hesitation in declaring their views. However, in the semi-public context of collective worship they were very reluctant to do so because they felt it infringed the ethos of an open, critical, liberal education which sees religious belief as a matter for private decision because it is a disputed area with no generally agreed criteria for settling this dispute. This view of education sees the school's role as making pupils aware of the range of views and the arguments for and against them, but in no way seeking to influence pupils one way or another in matters of religious belief.

The power of this liberal educational context was well illustrated by one teacher at the Catholic school who had spent many years in a county high school. In this latter situation he operated in a quite different manner - he could make no assumptions about the faith of the pupils and could not do anything which might be construed as nurturing. In the

Catholic school he was freed from this constraint and able to operate in a manner in which his personal Christian beliefs and his professional role were not so much at odds with each other. He explained:

> It's a lot easier here simply because we are standing on a Catholic Christian platform here and the aims of the school and everything that runs through is a Christian pathway. In a more secular school, like the one I worked in for a long time, you have to be very careful about the stories that you choose and try to find the moral standpoint which is agreeable maybe to the faiths of all the people in front of you. (cH1.3.3)

Many of the teachers with strong religious beliefs faced profound issues of conscience about how to handle the tension between their own beliefs and the beliefs of liberal education which have become normative in most schools. Most tried very hard to be even-handed and not to manipulate the pupils and the concern to avoid indoctrination was very high as already discussed in chapter five. The teachers varied in how they responded to this tension. Some made a point of trying to be 'unbiased' in their approach and would not even express their own beliefs - as one said, "I try to be completely unbiased in the things I tell them about" (I2.1.7). Others acknowledged that their beliefs were a significant underlying influence on the way they approached collective worship, but tried not to make this explicit. A few (e.g. J2.3, H2.2) were prepared to say, 'I believe . . .', but made it quite plain that this was their belief and they did not expect the children to share it or to see it as normative for all. There seemed to be three main factors which affected the teachers approach: the age of the children - it was easier for older children to handle the issue of conflicting beliefs; the evangelistic theology of the teacher - i.e. how and why they thought it appropriate to share their faith; and the prevailing educational ethos of the school with regard to the place of religious belief - how deeply imbued the liberal viewpoint was.

It is important to avoid too many generalisations in this matter because each teacher's approach was usually a complex matter in which they were balancing many competing forces. They were not always consistent in their views. Some would profess to avoid indoctrination and yet say such things as "God loves us all" without any qualification in an

assembly. There were others professing a 'neutral' attitude who seemed to have little understanding that the liberal view of education is itself deeply value-laden and that their approach effectively promoted that view.

There were at least four interesting examples of how the teachers dealt with some of this tension. These included: the young evangelical teacher (J2.3) whose approach to this 'dilemma' was to declare what he believed and offer it to the children for consideration and their own 'free' choice; the older teacher from the same school (J2.1) who was deeply committed to multicultural education, but made such a good job of presenting other faiths that sometimes his conscience hurt; and the high school teacher (H2.2) who initially thought the 1988 ERA was a call from God to more direct witness to her faith, but after much conscience searching decided this could not be right and adopted an approach which had a moral rather than a religious emphasis.

A fourth example is provided by a county high school teacher who had a strong religious background which emphasised the importance of mission and evangelism. He was also deeply affected by a liberal ethos of education which sought to be even-handed in the matter of religious belief. He expressed this conflict as follows:

> I find that a considerable personal challenge - basically to reconcile some things that my upbringing says I shouldn't be reconciling in terms of common truths. . . .
> . . . I could not stand up in an assembly and say that this view of God is the same as that view of God and they are of equal worth. I think that is a far more complex matter - and that really is the sort of very fine line that I try and keep one side of basically. (H3.1.12)

A key phrase here is the "very fine line". It indicates the complexity of the situation. Most teachers find their own individual way of dealing with this. A simple formula of 'teacher neutrality' does not do justice to the subtleties and nuances of the situation. Teachers are not just people who follow a liberal educational philosophy in a machine-like manner; nor are they naive religious enthusiasts eager to proselytise. They have a real tension to deal with and each does it in their own manner. Wakeman (1995) described his position as a Christian teaching in a secular high school as "walking a mountain ridge

between the slippery slopes of preaching and moral neutrality." His approach involved giving his viewpoint as a Christian and encouraging pupils to make evaluations, but, as his analogy implies, this is a difficult line to keep.

Hulmes (1979) argued that the teacher's commitments inevitably affected the way he taught and suggested that the so-called 'neutrality' of the teacher could lead to a relativistic understanding of religious belief and also to an indifference - it simply does not matter which religious beliefs someone holds. He suggested that the teacher's own commitments should be used openly as a resource in R.E. and that this approach avoided unnecessary and misleading pretence. In a similar vein, Newbigin (1982) argued against the standpoint of the 1975 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus which he said, "insists that religions are not to be studied with the idea that one is superior to the rest, but 'objectively and for their own sake'" (p. 99). Newbigin commented that:

> The point of view of this Syllabus . . . is the point of view of a secular, liberal inhabitant of the Western capitalist post-Christian world. This point of view is naturally accepted by the majority of the inhabitants of this corner of the world as being simply 'how things really are'. This is the character of all myths. Those who inhabit them do not 'see' them, because they are the framework, the model by means of which they see. (p. 100)

Following on from this, Newbigin pointed out that, "A teacher who, in a detached spirit, merely surveys the various possible points of view on the matter, without trying to communicate what he himself sees, is likely to communicate only his own attitude. In fact he will communicate the typical 'stance for living' . . . of our rather tired culture: 'Taste everything, but don't be committed to anything.'" (p.104). He concluded that:

> The central matter is surely the commitment of the teacher. We must reject the illusion of non-commitment. Every teacher is committed to something . . . . He should not be asked to pretend that he is above all commitment, that he has a stance above all stances from which he can 'critically' assess them all. What will ultimately be communicated to the pupils is the commitment of the teacher, and therefore this must be open and explicit. (p.107)

These comments and the tensions faced by the teachers suggest that a more open approach needs to be found which allows greater freedom of expression than that

prescribed by the liberal ideal of teacher neutrality, whilst still promoting an open and critical spirit in pupils.

The teacher's own integrity

As well as the desire to avoid indoctrination, the teachers expressed a need to be true to their own basic beliefs and values in the way they led collective worship. There were several comments which indicated this: "If I didn't believe that [common truths across religions] there would be no justification for doing it at all, ... I wouldn't have any conviction in doing it" (J1.1.2); "I think if you are doing collective worship you have got to be true to yourself" (J3.3.12); "I've got to believe it myself, I've got to enjoy it myself. . . . I would be myself whatever school I went into and be doing the same sort of thing . . . wherever I happened to be." (cJ1.1.6); "we are also very sincere when we're up on stage, intentionally so. . . . I think the sincerity does come across . . . . sincerity is probably the technique by which we have everybody on our side" (H1.1.8). In the last two of these quotations the tactic used to achieve both teacher integrity and pupil integrity in a multifaith context was to look for common moral ground on which everyone can agree.

Challenges to the teachers' beliefs

There was some evidence in the data to suggest that teachers' basic beliefs were being challenged and modified by the experience of leading collective worship. This modification of beliefs was another way of dealing with the tensions faced. One high school teacher who was a Christian said she had come to believe that there were different paths to God and much of the difference was due to people's varying cultural contexts, but she then added the comment, "I suppose, in a sense, if I really went in front of the Bishop, I might get excommunicated for saying 'I don't think Christ is the only way to God'" (H2.2.12). A similar idea is present in the quotation (mentioned above) in which another high school teacher said he found it a considerable personal challenge to be reconciling some things his upbringing said he should not be reconciling in terms of common truths (H3.1.12). Thus it would seem that we are in a fluid and moving situation

as views are challenged and changed by the tensions faced by the teachers in the task of leading collective worship.

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

The "new sacerdotal class"

This was the title which Disraeli gave to teachers during the debates on the 1870 Education Act which gave them responsibility for teaching religion in schools - the first time such a task had been given to a functionary of the State rather than to a priest or other person authorised by the Church. My data has suggested that the teachers who lead the collective worship are by far the most significant influence on its content and style - they have to feel 'comfortable' with what is being done; they draw on their own experience and background for material; they are often deeply influenced by their own basic beliefs and values, not in a crude way of seeking to indoctrinate the children, but in a more subtle way in that if they are not 'comfortable' with what is being done then it will not happen.

This has at least two very significant consequences for the place and understanding of religious belief in collective worship. The first of these is the ***power*** of the teachers to define common spirituality in an age where most pupils have little or no link with any institutional religion. The second is the ***chosen and constructed*** character of the spirituality which is expressed in collective worship. There was also some evidence that the ***teachers' own beliefs were being modified*** - at least in part - due to their experience of collective worship. Each of these will now be looked at in turn.

By whose authority?

A question of power

In the years following the 1944 Education Act it was assumed that Christianity provided the basis for collective worship in schools. Most school worship was strongly Christian in format and the 'authority' for what it contained came from the Christian faith - it was not

the construction of the teachers who delivered the worship. Today's situation, despite the privileged place of the Christian Faith in the 1988 ERA, is very different. The advent of a more plural and diverse society has meant that there are many groups with a legitimate claim to have an influence over what goes on in collective worship. These include parents, pupils, teachers, governors, faith communities, the government and society at large. The problem, in a situation of increasingly diverse views, is how the demands of these groups should be accommodated. There is a real issue of power underlying this - if there is an ideological vacuum then the obvious danger is that the most powerful and well organised group gets its way.

In a discussion of educational policy in pluralist democracies, Holmes (1992) has pointed out that:

> Pluralist democracies face a serious problem in preparing their systems of education for the new world of heterogeneity and dissent. . . . No English-speaking democracy . . . has until recently had to face the combined challenges of fundamental dissent about ideology and purpose, and social, religious and cultural heterogeneity represented by pluralism and multiculturalism. (Holmes 1992, vi)

Holmes suggests that "the idea of the public school in the western world is premised on an assumption of a living community sharing consensual educational goals. . . . That ideal of the common school has run headlong into the realities of the modern age. . . . Of all the realities, the most evident is dissent." (p.15). Pluralism implies that there are genuinely competing world-views and educational philosophies. The liberal, secular perspective on education, which has dominated western schools for so long, is now being seriously challenged as I have described in chapter two. Holmes sums up the nature of this conflict, in this example between traditional Christian and liberal secular views of education, when he says:

> If Christianity represents truth, its exclusion from the greater part of education is unthinkable. Its truth is so central to the good life (the prime purpose of education, by the Traditional philosophy), that it would make little more sense for it to be excluded from education by the Christian than for reason to be excluded by the secular liberal. (p. 89)

There is, therefore, a real battle to be fought. There are questions to be faced as to what extent schooling should be differentiated for different children, who should make such choices, and by what criteria. (p.2).

Some recent articles have indicated that this struggle is well underway and several groups are involved. Firstly, there is the ***government***. Hull (1993) has argued that Circular 1/94 represents a "theology of the Department for Education" which is characterised by: treating religions as separate and integral (this tends to marginalise religions other than Christianity); seeing Christianity as central to British national heritage; and saying that Christianity must predominate in this country. We need not necessarily agree with Hull's analysis in order to see that the government is a major player in the power game. It is widely agreed that successive governments have used schools in general and R.E. and collective worship in particular as vehicles for the moral education of future citizens.

The ***teachers*** also have power and influence in this area. In my interview (on 3/10/96) with Dr. Nicholas Tate, the Chief Executive of what was then called SCAA, he said concerning collective worship, "This is an area where heads, I think, feel - secondary heads in particular - feel it ought to be left to my discretion. . . . Heads feel this is . . . so at the heart of my relationship with the pupils and the school community, that it really is an area where we ought to be allowed to do it at our own discretion. . . . they're being made to do something they don't feel comfortable with. . . . and there's a culture of feeling that really we're in charge and the law doesn't have to be obeyed." This clearly expresses a sense of conflict between the heads in general and the law.

Robson (1996, 13ff) has given an interesting account of the interplay between "policy makers" (by which he means those who seek to shape the law on R.E. and collective worship) and "those professionally involved in religious education." He suggests that "the tension between the intentions of the policy makers for religious education and the practice of those committed to teaching the subject in schools are not simply the product

of recent legislation, but go back well over a hundred years" (p.13), and that, "Parliamentary debates about religious education have rarely considered it in educational terms. Almost invariably the subject has been caught up in the unfinished debate on British national identity." (p.16).

Then again the ***faith communities*** all want a say as well. As I have described in chapter two, there is an increasingly strong Muslim critique of liberal education, and recently separate Muslim 'aided schools' have been establised. The Christian Churches, too, see fit to make statements on collective worship (e.g. CJEPC statement, November 1995) and seek to influence what goes on. The Bishop of London played a very major part in the passage of the R.E. and collective worship clauses of the 1988 ERA. Many other faith communities have also produced statements on collective worship.

Parents are also deeply concerned for the religious upbringing of their children. Harte (1991, 158) has drawn attention to the provisions under sections 7(5) and 7(6) of the 1988 ERA which say that the family background of the children must be taken into account in collective worship and provide for the possibility of a 'determination'. He suggests that this provision illustrates "the conflict between those who emphasize the right of parents to determine what they see as probably the most important aspect of their children's education and the belief of others with power in society that such freedom is socially harmful." The only point to note here is that there is a genuine conflict of interest and power.

In a recent article on the move in R.E. towards the study of separate religions, Rudge (1998, 155) argued on behalf of what have been called "the religions of the silent majority." She characterises the religions of this "***silent majority***" by drawing on the classification of Wolffe (1993) of conventional, civil, common and invisible religion. Conventional religion here involves occasional attendance at a formal religious service; civil religion refers to ceremonial occasions in national or civil life, sometimes with

religious symbols; common religion includes folk traditions, but not connected with institutional religion; and invisible religion refers to some manifestations of community life such as a football match. She says, "The silent majority have no specific religious community, their beliefs are perpetuated through disconnected events and structures, and they are often left without a language to describe themselves, should they wish to do so." (p.160). She quotes the argument of Wolffe (1993) that these religions are vital in the context of an increased secularisation and spiritual diversity of society, and, therefore, she suggests need to be given greater prominence in the R.E. syllabus. Clearly it is not difficult to make a similar case for the needs of the "silent majority" in collective worship.

All of these groups, in their different ways, are seeking to influence the spiritual formation of children in collective worship. My data has indicated that the most powerful influence is the individual teacher who leads collective worship.

The common school creed - liberal or illiberal?

There was much evidence in my data to show that the ideological framework of liberal education was deeply influential with my sample of teachers. Many of them would have been trained in the 1960s and 1970s when the views of Hirst (e.g. 1974) were dominant. This approach consigns religious belief to the 'private' domain and suggests that the school's role is simply to make children aware of the range of disputed views and leave them to make their own choices. Ideas of nurturing in a faith are firmly expunged from the common school. Such a view tends to lead to an understanding of religious belief which is relative, plural, and instrumental as suggested in previous chapters.

However, there are now many voices challenging the hegemonic position of this liberal view of education - again, these have been described and analysed in previous chapters. In particular, we should note the criticism that this view itself is deeply value-laden, non-neutral, and not accepted by all. Liberalism which stressed freedom of belief turns out to be profoundly illiberal in some directions. For example, it cannot accommodate a

view (such as the traditional Muslim understanding of education) which sees nurture as fundamental to education. Therefore it can be argued that it is no longer adequate as the ideological basis for education in a genuinely plural society. A more realistic approach would be to give greater recognition to the diversity of educational philosophies, of which the liberal view is but one, and create schools of a more diverse character, each based on a particular view. This idea will be developed in the next chapter.

Beliefs and world-views - chosen and constructed?

The over-riding influence of the teacher in the content and style of collective worship also has implications for seeing religious and other worldviews as individually chosen and constructed. The general approach of the teachers which usually attempted to be even-handed and non-evaluative between faiths can create an atmosphere in which religious beliefs are seen as a matter of arbitrary choice with each individual taking the components he or she needs to construct a world-view which suits them.

The particular choices made by teachers are also going to have a substantial effect on the pupils. The new 'spirituality' of collective worship is being fashioned by the choices of the teachers and each one makes his choice by his own lights. This is in marked contrast to the approach of the post-war years when Christianity was assumed to provide the basic framework for school worship. Loosemore (1965, 340) quoted from the 1954 report of the Institute of Christian Education which said, "We perceive no tendency to foster 'a school religion,' impoverished in itself and mischievous in so far as it might offer a substitute for worship in the churches. On the contrary, school services often draw upon the wealth of all the churches in the hymns and prayers they use . . . ." In the vacuum created by the demise of the influence of Christianity in school worship in the intervening years my data suggests that teachers are currently in a position where they can and do create their own 'school religion' - although 'school spirituality' would be a more accurate term to describe this multi-faceted and heterogeneous phenomenon.

In a related area, Halstead and Khan-Cheema (1987, 25), writing from a Muslim perspective, have pointed to fears that in the thematic approach to teaching R.E., "The selection of themes may reflect the biases of the selector (rarely a Muslim), and an unbalanced picture of Islam may emerge". The picture of religious belief which is portrayed in both R.E. and in collective worship is open to considerable distortion (as seen from the point of view of the believer) if the teacher has a very large amount of freedom to select material and present it as he or she wishes.

In such a situation the pupils are highly vulnerable, especially given the widespread uncertainty and ignorance of religious belief. The possibilities of moulding and manipulation are obvious. Lewis (1943) warned that the loss of belief in objectivity leads educationally to attitudes inculcated in the young being the arbitrary decisions of their educators. The widespread belief among the teachers in my sample in common moral values and a common core to all religions would suggest that this danger of which Lewis warned is not so immediate - certainly in the domain of moral education. However, we should remember that my sample teachers mostly had a religious upbringing and many of their views were a legacy of that. We cannot be so confident that the next generation of teachers, many of whom will not have had such an upbringing, will still adhere to these beliefs. There were already trends in my data in a more postmodern direction with regard to religious beliefs with such comments as "if you believe it then it is true" (P1.3 11). There is every possibility that this trend will continue to grow.

Changing beliefs

As mentioned above it was certainly true that some teachers in my sample were experiencing a modification of their basic beliefs which was due, at least in part, to their experience in collective worship. New beliefs were being forged which were at variance with the traditional views of their faith. Eventually these revised beliefs may come more into the mainstream of those faiths themselves.

Davie (1994) has drawn attention to the widespread phenomenon of "believing without belonging" - i.e. many people holding deep religious or spiritual beliefs, but having no link with any organised, institutional religion. In such a situation people's beliefs, shorn of the influence of conventional religion, are likely to mutate and develop in response to their experience. Teachers operating in the context of school collective worship have to deal with a particularly complex situation and it is likely that this experience will affect their views.

CONCLUSION

My data has suggested that the teachers' influence is by far the most powerful in determining the content and style of collective worship. This influence has become even stronger with the declining place of Christianity and the advent of a plural society. Despite the intentions of the 1988 ERA, in the absence of an over-riding belief or value system which is broadly accepted by all, the teachers have been put in the position of having to be the arbiters of what happens - their judgement is the critical factor. This powerful position of the teachers in collective worship has been enhanced by the official government endorsement of schools generating their own ethos and values. The way in which teachers use this influence in their leading of collective worship has a significant effect on the understanding of religious belief that is portrayed.

PART THREE

CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS: RELIGIOUS BELIEF AS AN 'INDIVIDUALLY CHOSEN, PRIVATE, PRACTICAL GUIDE TO LIVING'

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research has been to describe and analyse the understanding of religious belief (with particular reference to the concept of 'truth') which underlies the practice of collective worship in a sample of Luton schools. I have adopted an approach which has been primarily interpretive and grounded, aiming to describe things through the teachers' eyes in their terms, and building a critical analysis from the data. Four strong themes emerged which have been described in the last four chapters - the data was 'saturated' with these themes. Each of them has implications for the understanding of religious belief which have been analysed in the relevant chapter. This concluding chapter aims to carry this analysis further and to draw links with wider educational and theological theory.

In particular, I shall look at the implications of this study for the understanding of the 'truth' of religious belief in the context of collective worship. One of the reasons this is of importance is that collective worship in schools is one of the places in our society where religious belief has to be dealt with in 'public space' (other examples being chaplains in hospitals or prisons, and civic services). It is beyond the scope of this study to prove the following claim, but the way in which teachers handle the issue of religious belief in collective worship could be an important indicator of the way it is handled in 'public space' by wider society.

In brief, I shall be arguing that teachers in my sample have treated religious belief in the context of collective worship as an ***individually chosen, private, practical guide to living***. In the terminology of grounded theory this is my 'core category' which Strauss and Corbin (1990, 116) define as "the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated." This approach has had the consequences that religious belief

has been both treated in a highly relativised manner and also seen as marginal to 'public' life.

I shall argue further that this way of treating religious belief falls almost entirely within a liberal, rationalist framework. The data does indicate that there are a few postmodern strands to the teachers' approach although these are minor in comparison with the influence on them of liberalism. Many of the key issues (e.g. indoctrination, freedom of choice in religion, the distinction between knowledge and belief) in the current debate over collective worship depend on this liberal paradigm. However, this very paradigm has come under increasing attack from many different directions and it is very unlikely that it can provide a satisfactory framework for education for the future. It certainly cannot give an adequate, widely agreed basis for collective worship in schools. Schools, and also wider society, are caught at the present moment between powerful, competing cultural forces. We are still heavily dominated by the assumptions of liberal rationalism, but these are proving unable to support the wide variety of demands from diverse groups - both religious and non-religious - in a genuinely plural society. If we are to emerge from the present quagmire in the collective worship debate a new framework is needed which is more thoroughly plural in character and can avoid the 'Scylla' of exclusive fundamentalism on the one hand, and the 'Charybdis' of easy-going relativism on the other hand.

It is not within the scope of this study to give a thorough analysis of its implications for collective worship policy, but one or two very brief guidelines will be suggested at the end.

CURRENT ATTEMPTS TO SALVAGE COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Problems and tensions facing teachers who lead collective worship

I shall begin by recapitulating some of the difficulties faced by teachers in their task of leading collective worship. These have been dealt with mostly elsewhere in the text, but it

is useful to summarise them briefly at this point. There are at least eight major problems: confusion of purpose in collective worship; the diversity and plural character of the school community and society at large; secularisation and the privatisation of religious belief; the connection between a pupil's individual beliefs and the values of the school community; the link between moral nurture and religious nurture; the relationship between open, critical education and more traditional understandings of education which focus on nurture; the position of the teacher's own beliefs; and the tension between the 'Christian heritage' and the 'multicultural' lobbies. Each of these will be looked at briefly.

There is, and as argued in chapter two has been since the 1870 Education Act, a confusion over the aims of collective worship in state schools. The CJEPC statement on collective worship suggested that, "There should be a clearer appreciation of the nature, aims and objectives of worship in a school context." (CJEPC 1995, paragraph 1.2). The document points to some of the problems in doing this when it says that worship in schools is "distinctive", i.e. *sui generis*, in that it requires an activity labelled 'worship' (which normally carries many assumptions about belief and commitment) to take place in the context of a school (which normally carries many assumptions about an open, critical approach to education). These tensions have been elucidated most succinctly by Hull (1975). The CJEPC statement is typical of many when it tries to resolve these tensions by arguing for an open, educational approach to school worship which allows, but does not presume any particular response, whilst at the same time builds a sense of school ethos and community (CJEPC 1995, section 3).

In my data the teachers expressed a considerable variety of aims for collective worship. There were at least five substantial aims given: a ***social aim*** of building a sense of school community and ethos; a ***moral aim*** of encouraging good behaviour; an ***educational aim*** of increasing children's awareness and understanding of the variety of world-views and thereby increasing their range of possible choices; a ***national aim*** of promoting a sense of national identity and belonging; and a ***religious aim*** of nurturing faith. The teachers

varied considerably as to how much emphasis they gave to each of these aims, but broadly speaking the first three aims were largely agreed upon and the last two were much more contentious, especially the last.

The diverse and plural character of the school community was the second major difficulty for the teachers. In the years after the Second World War there was an assumption that the country was more homogeneously Christian in character, and school worship drew its rationale and content from Christian sources. With the changes of the 1960s which I described in chapter two, this assumption is no longer valid. Teachers now often face a heterogeneous, multicultural school community comprised of a variety of religious faiths and other views. Even if a particular school is not so heterogeneous, there is a strong awareness that this is a key feature of wider society which cannot be ignored.

There are at least two particular dangers for collective worship in this situation. The first is that teachers resort to a shallow and uncritical relativism, which treats all beliefs as equally valid. There was much evidence in the data to suggest that this was occurring on a wide scale. The second danger is that, in the absence of a predominant faith, the content of the assembly is largely down to the individual teacher's own choice. Although the law requires that the majority of acts of collective worship "shall be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" [1988 ERA section 7.(1)], my data suggested that in practice this is interpreted in a very general way and the teacher's influence over both the content and the style of an assembly is substantial. Whilst the judgement of any given teacher may be very good in this matter, it does seem to leave too much discretion and power in the hands of teachers in a crucial area of moral and spiritual formation given the legitimate claims of families, faith communities and others to have some influence over what goes on.

The third difficulty teachers face is the effect of secularisation and the privatisation of belief. Although the debate over the 'secularisation' thesis continues to rage, there can be

little doubt that the overt influence of organised religions over many area of public life has diminished significantly when compared with previous eras of British history (Wilson 1966, 11). Education is an obvious example: prior to the nineteenth century the Church was responsible for most of the educational provision in this country, now it is the State. One of the consequences of this is that religious belief is often considered to be a private matter for each individual to make their own free choice. This is one of the central tenets of liberalism as expressed, for example, in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948, articles 2,18,19,26). This immediately presents teachers with a clear dilemma: they are being asked to conduct a semi-public act of worship with a group of pupils who have to be there (although they do have a right of withdrawal this is rarely exercised) in an area which is a matter of private, individual choice.

The fourth difficulty facing teachers concerns the connection between individual beliefs and school ethos. They are required to do all they can to assist pupils to develop their own individual beliefs and values, whilst at the same time having to "promote a common ethos and shared values" (DFE Circular 1/94, paragraph 50). There is a clear tension between the two. This is further complicated by the family background of the pupils. What is the school to do if there is a clash in values, as has occurred for example with many aspects of the Muslim faith (e.g. dress code, separation of the sexes, diet, prayer times)?

A fifth problem concerns the link between moral nurture and religious nurture. There is significant evidence that governments have used RE and collective worship as a vehicle for the moral nurture of citizens. Historically the Christian faith has been the main tool for this purpose (Copley 1997, 24). It can be argued that the 1988 ERA is an attempt to resuscitate the position of the Christian faith in this respect (although recent initiatives in spiritual, moral, citizenship and values education suggest that there is a need for alternatives). This approach has many difficulties of which I will only mention two. Firstly, the link between moral education and RE is hotly disputed. Many (e.g. the British

Humanist Association) would want to argue that moral education can be undertaken perfectly well on a non-religious basis. Secondly, it is debatable as to whether or not religious nurture of any kind should be undertaken by a state school.

The sixth problem concerns the understanding of education as 'open' and 'critical'. Many (e.g. Hirst 1974) would argue that encouraging an open and critical rationality where all is subject to scrutinisation is of the essence of education. Any approach which seems to assume contentious (religious) beliefs as beyond examination is shunned as 'indoctrination'. There was much evidence in my data to suggest that such a view was very widespread in my sample of teachers.

The seventh difficulty is the place of the teacher's own beliefs. The teachers bring, as one put it, their "own baggage" to school. Some of them held strong religious beliefs and a few were in no doubt that their religion was the 'best' and 'most true', not only for them in a relative and subjective sense, but for all people in an absolute and objective sense. This had to be held in tension with the professional obligations put upon them by the educational context. They were not to exert undue influence on the children to convert them to their way of thinking. Some adopted a stance of presumed neutrality and would not declare their own views, but only say 'Christians believe . . .' or 'Muslims believe . . .' Others were prepared to say, 'I believe . . .', but making it clear they did not presume that the pupils had to so believe, and being careful not to make invidious comparisons with other competing beliefs.

The final difficulty is the tension between the 'Christian heritage' lobby and the 'multicultural' lobby. Collective worship (and its Christian bias) has strong popular and legal backing. But there is also a powerful educational philosophy (as, for example, in the Swann Report 1985) which emphasises the equal validity of many world-views. Teachers who have to lead collective worship are caught between these lobbies.

It is fairly clear from the above that in leading collective worship teachers have to tread a very fine line between many competing forces. It is questionable as to whether or not it is possible to find a way of doing this which is both widely acceptable and has a firm educational basis.

Heroic attempts to salvage collective worship

Given the substantial problems, teachers have exercised considerable ingenuity in re-shaping collective worship in a manner which faces up to the current realities of the plural nature of society, is educationally acceptable, and at least attempts to fit in with the law.

The re-definition of 'worship'

The first tactic adopted by the teachers was to extend, bend and re-define the concept of 'worship'. Despite the attempt of Circular 1/94 (paragraph 57) to give worship its "natural and ordinary meaning" as "concerned with reverence or veneration paid to a divine being or power," most of the teachers in my sample were much more comfortable with the broader and more inclusive notion of '***worthship***' as commended, for example, by Gent (1989, 9) who says, "The practical consequences of adopting a wide, inclusive concept of collective worship are far-reaching, the touchstone for the use of any particular style or element within school worship being its capacity to engage people in ways appropriate to themselves." This approach emphasises the centrality of the individual's own open and free response to what is done and does not presume anything in terms of religious belief in the pupils, although as we shall see below it has important consequences for the implicit understanding of religious belief which is portrayed when collective worship is undertaken in this manner.

Many teachers, as described in chapter six, made ***morality*** the centre of their collective worship. This was often done in the belief that there was a widely agreed moral code which it was acceptable to promote. Other teachers, but far fewer, used the idea of

spirituality as a universal, inner experience as a uniting factor in collective worship. Spirituality, as explained in chapter six, was seen as inward, personal, and experiential and therefore was not subject to the obvious problems which occur with the variety of conflicting religious beliefs.

The school community as a nurturer of moral values

Most teachers in my sample took this role extremely seriously and some (as described in chapter six) even saw the school as a moral bulwark in an increasingly immoral society. The attempt by SCAA (National Forum for Values in Education and the Community 1996) to provide an agreed statement of values on which teachers could base their work, and the OFSTED inspection framework which requires inspectors to look at how well the school teaches "the principles which separate right from wrong", clearly indicate that the government wants to promote this role (OFSTED 1995b, 84). This strong trend in collective worship raises at least two important questions. Firstly, how are moral values nurtured, and secondly, what is the status of any moral values promoted by the school?

On the first of these matters several writers have drawn attention to ***the importance of moral communities in the formation of moral values***. In chapter four I drew attention to the seminal views of Durkheim on the roles of both education and religion in the moral formation of the young. With the decline in institutional religion Durkheim believed that society would continue to need a functional equivalent which both united people and gave them a common moral base. He suggested that:

> This moral remaking cannot be achieved except by means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals, being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments; hence come ceremonies which do not differ from regular religious ceremonies, either in their object, the results which they produce, or the processes employed to attain these results. (Durkheim 1915, 427)

In contemporary British society school assemblies are an important form of such ceremonies. With over 85% of children having no contact with any institutional religion the role of the school as a place where common values are formed is increasingly

important, although this begs the question of how effective the school is in this task when compared with other influences such as peers, family, and the media.

Gill (1992, 51) has noted that "the purely individual, rational paradigm within which so much moral philosophy has been cast, is inadequate. To resolve moral issues adequately within society there needs to be some community or communities which share values together . . . ." His principle argument is concerned with Christian churches and he suggests that "worshipping communities may still be significant harbingers and carriers of values in an often fragmented world" (p.2), but he cites the work of both MacIntyre (1988) and Bellah et al. (1985) in support of the more general conclusion that "communities are essential for nurturing and sustaining values in society" (p.52). He comments that "religious and moral visions are passed on through communities. They are not simply argued out on rational principles from individual to individual. They are acquired as much through belonging" (p.21). The writings of Sacks (1991) and Mitchell (1994) have also emphasised the importance of communities and traditions in moral formation. I shall return to this key issue later.

We are still left with ***the issue of the status of any moral values propounded under the aegis of the school***. The 1996 SCAA 'National Forum' consultation identified accepted common values, but made no attempt to give a common foundation. The values did not derive from any particular tradition; they were seen as a '*de facto*' consensus of contemporary British society, or at least of those who took part in the consultation process. As such they might be seen as having a certain democratic authority. But to argue that something is morally right because the majority of people think it is so is clearly weak ground for moral authority and many would want to place moral authority on stronger ground - either secular (e.g. utilitarianism) or religious. The SCAA values can also be criticised on the grounds that they represent a 'least common denominator' approach and will never be sufficient to provide a moral basis for living other than minimal 'public' values necessary to hold society together.

The lack of an agreed moral authority in our fragmented society often leaves the teachers in an invidious position of being arbiters of morality. They are required to produce statements about school values and ethos. There are clearly profound issues underlying this with regard to the status of any such values and their relation to values derived from other sources such as religious belief.

The search for a new common language

As has been pointed out earlier these problems of authority were not nearly so severe in the more homogeneous British society of the 1950s when the Christian faith could still act as the theological basis for school worship. In today's more heterogeneous and plural society there have been a number of notable attempts to provide a new common language to underpin the activity of collective worship. There are three main concepts which have been suggested: spirituality, citizenship, and values. All of these were discussed in chapter six. The issue which I will develop at this point concerns the question of how we are to view such attempts to find a common language. Is it like trying to persuade people to speak 'esperanto', a language which nobody at present speaks and without a history or tradition? Or can such concepts provide a 'lingua franca', a means of providing genuine understanding between views whose 'languages' are very different? Or is it the last gasp of a hegemonic liberalism, desperately trying to find a vehicle by which its view of religion can continue to dominate public education for another generation?

Sacks (1991, 66ff) has drawn attention to the need in a postmodern, plural society to learn to speak two languages. He suggests that there is a deadlock between "two conflicting views of freedom," both of which contain "non-negotiable values." One is the liberal who sees religions as "an assault on personal autonomy," and the other is the traditionalist who sees liberalism as "undermining religious authority." He says that the way out of this situation is to be bilingual with "a first and public language of citizenship which we have to learn if we are to live together", and "a variety of second languages

which connect us to our local framework of relationships: to family and group and the traditions that underly them." In a later publication he comments that

> there is a delicate interplay between our second languages of identity and our first language of common citizenship. If we recognize only the first language, we are in effect calling for the disappearance of minorities. If we insist on second languages to the exclusion of a common culture, we risk moving to a society of conflicting ghettoes. . . . Jews are used to living with the tension. For the past two centuries we have negotiated an equilibrium between our Jewish and British identities. We know what it is to speak two languages, to strive to be true to our traditions while contributing to the common good. It is not easy, but it can be done. In a plural society, the modern Jewish condition becomes the human condition *tout court.* (Sacks 1995, 119-120)

Sacks does not say much about how the first language of citizenship comes into being. Is it a matter of '*de facto*' areas of overlap between radically different world-views? Or does it derive from an all-embracing ideology of liberalism which purports to provide a framework within which competing views can live? Sacks goes to great lengths to attack what he sees as the corrosive effects of liberal individualism, but his talk of a language of citizenship seems to suggest some kind of overarching framework is being presumed - a kind of neo-liberalism.

We also need to think about the scope of such a language. It is noteworthy that he calls it a "language of citizenship," suggesting that its domain concerns those areas of public life where we need to interact with others outside our faith group. If that is so then the attempt to generate a common concept of 'spirituality' would seem doomed to failure because it properly belongs to Sacks' second language of identity.

MacIntyre (1988) also talks in terms of different languages. He argues against the liberal individualist account of a "socially disembodied" rationality (p.4) and suggests that we need to recover the idea of "a conception of rational enquiry as embodied in a tradition" (p.7). This, of course, raises the issue of communication and understanding between traditions. He maintains that although there are distinct traditions of rationality, nevertheless communication is possible by learning a "second first language." To do this he says that "one has, so to speak, to become a child all over again and learn this language

- and the corresponding parts of the culture" (p.374). His emphasis seems to be on the effort to try to get inside rival traditions in order to understand them whilst recognising that any one person can only properly inhabit one tradition. He seems to vere away from trying to develop a common language. His approach begs questions about the boundaries of competing traditions of rationality. In the postmodern moment, eclecticism seems to operate successfully for many people. We need to consider the question of which tradition of rationality a typical Luton school pupil might inhabit? It is quite likely to be several and some will be mutually inconsistent.

Both Sacks and MacIntyre illustrate the enormous problems raised by the need for communication and common ground in a genuinely plural world in which it is recognised that different languages entail different rationalities. Easy translation is not possible because in many areas the description of reality is radically different. This would suggest that any attempt to find a common language and common spirituality for collective worship is going to be extremely difficult. Indeed the frequent cry concerning both citizenship and spirituality is that they are vague, ill-defined concepts upon which no-one can agree because they are all coming at it from different perspectives (e.g. Beck 1998, 62ff, 96ff).

Teacher survival tactics

It is not surprising given the complexity of the situation that teachers have developed a variety of tactics for dealing with collective worship and some of the tensions described. The main ones occurring in my sample were:

- ***Avoidance, especially of areas of potential conflict between beliefs***. There was a strong fear of causing unnecessary offence or upset. Teachers also often spoke of their lack of detailed knowledge of different religions which made them hesitant in saying anything about them for fear of getting it wrong.
- ***Focusing on the moral issues rather than beliefs*** - which could be construed as aversion of avoidance.

- ***Seeing their role as promoting awareness of the diversity of beliefs so that the children could make their own informed judgement at an appropriate stage.*** The teachers avoided making judgements between belief systems (i.e. reflecting the phenomenological approach to teaching Religious Education which stresses the neutrality of the teacher in matters of religious belief, at least in the school context).
- ***Always prefacing comments about religious belief by "Christians believe . . ." etc.*** i.e. making it clear that such beliefs are not being presumed upon the whole population.
- ***Allowing an 'open' response to what is said or done in collective worship.***
- ***Looking for common ground between the different beliefs.*** Underlying this sometimes was the belief that the different religions were different paths seeking the same goal. One teacher called this "essential truth".
- ***Promoting attitudes of mutual understanding, respect and tolerance for the diversity of beliefs.***

Almost all of these, as we shall see below, involved operating within a liberal paradigm of education, but before examining that more closely I must consider the implications of the current manner of conducting collective worship for the understanding of religious belief - the issue which is at the heart of this study.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF UNDERLYING THE CURRENT PRACTICE OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Models of school worship and underlying epistemologies

As described in chapter six, Webster (1990, 151ff, also 1995) has given a helpful description of five different models of collective worship and the assumptions upon which they are based. An important question for my study is whether or not any of Webster's models fit the patterns of school worship in my sample because each of them entails different understandings of the nature of the 'truth' of religious belief.

We also need to probe more deeply into the understanding of religious belief underlying the practice of collective worship and its implications. Hill (1990, 126ff) investigates the question of whether or not multi-faith approaches to religious studies will have the effect of encouraging either scepticism or religious relativism. In order to answer this he gives a careful analysis of different types of relativism (epistemological, conceptual, religious) and examines the various epistemologies which might be presupposed by the multi-faith approach to religious studies. He describes these as: "*literal-exclusive*" which suggests that religion does give "important truth about the nature of reality", that "only one religious system can ultimately be right about the essentials, believes it has access to that one, and assumes that it therefore only makes sense to teach that one"; "*literal-persuasive*" which "endorses the view that truth-claims in sentence form *are* intrinsic to religious discourse, and that in the end only one religion can can ultimately be right about the minimum core description of the world", but "recognizes that many religions claim to have that answer" and therefore the school should teach them all and encourage "personal choice on the most reasonable grounds available"; "*quasi-literal-inclusive*" which accepts that "it is appropriate to seek truth in religious belief-claims", but "draws back from the assumption that any one religion has the ultimate key to the minimum core"; and "*mythical-persuasive*" which "sees the function of religion to be the dissemination of general ideas and heroic stories which reduce anxiety and foster purposeful living, while taking it for granted that there are many paths to peace" and therefore individuals should be encouraged "to make a personal choice on psychological grounds."

It is not necessary here to evaluate either Webster's models or Hill's typology of epistemologies. As suggested above, I intend to use the former to enquire whether or not any of these models fit the patterns of school worship in my sample because each of them entails different understandings of the nature of the 'truth' of religious belief, and I shall use the latter to probe the epistemologies of religious belief which might underly the practice of collective worship. Armed with these pieces of conceptual apparatus we can now proceed to describe and analyse the understanding of religious belief, and especially

the approach to the question of its 'truth', which underlies the practice of collective worship in my sample schools.

The understanding of religious belief, with particular reference to the concept of 'truth', underlying the practice of collective worship in the sample schools

The data suggested that in all but the Catholic school religious belief was treated as individual, personally chosen and constructed, private (and consequently marginal to public life), subjective, relative and pragmatic. The evidence for these claims has been presented in the results chapters (four to seven); what needs to be done here is a futher analysis of this description.

Religious belief as individual

As described in chapter five there was a tremendous emphasis on the freedom of the individual. Most of the teachers seemed to presuppose that their aim was to produce a liberal ideal of the pupil as an autonomous person guided by reason. The free-thinking, free-floating individual was central and this outweighed any sense of community identity. The latter was by no means ignored; there was great emphasis on the school community and, in many schools, on the faith backgrounds of the pupils, but this emphasis was secondary to the importance of the individual. For example, many teachers saw it as the role of education to make children aware of the variety of faiths and lifestyles so as to enhance their freedom of choice, and this was done regardless of the fact that many children came from homes with strong community traditions. Bruce (1995, 134) has suggested that individualism, which he defines as "the right to make choices" and "the right to define reality," is the key feature in understanding the place of religion in modern society. The European Values Study 1981-1990 provides significant empirical evidence on the important influences on value changes in Western Europe and says that two of the most significant are "individualism" (a "sharp sense of individuation" and the "individual as key decision taker") and "autonomy" (people acting "according to their own (divergent) norms") (European Values Group 1992, 6). The approach to religious belief taken in collective worship in my sample of schools corresponds with this trend.

Religious belief as freely chosen (and constructed)

Freedom of choice for the individual was talked about far more than the pursuit of truth. This could be driven primarily by the liberal notion that freedom to choose and practice one's religion is a fundamental human right. Some religions may give true pictures of reality, or they may not, but the individual still has the right to make his own free choice no matter how misguided that choice might seem to others. This openness in the matter of religious belief is founded on the idea that 'reasonable' people come to different conclusions in these matters and therefore they should be a matter for personal decision because there is no rational way of deciding between competing claims.

The emphasis on freedom of choice might also suggest a postmodern rather than liberal trend. In particular, the teacher questionnaire showed that there was in many teachers a lack of confidence in the concept of 'truth' when it came to religious belief. Some of the interview comments also indicated the postmodern idea that the individual has, as Bruce (1995, 134) puts it, "the right to define reality." Put in this way it becomes an epistemological claim that the reality we know is only what we construct. As Usher and Edwards (1994, 28) put it, "The postmodern reminds us that we construct our world through discourse and practice and that therefore, with a different discourse and a different set of practices, things could be otherwise." This reflects Cupitt's anthropocentric and voluntarist view of religious belief. He argues that, "All meaning and truth and value are man-made and could not be otherwise", that "religious beliefs . . . are not universal truths, but community-truths, and they guide lives rather than describe facts," and that "our most fundamental beliefs have simply to be chosen." (Cupitt 1984, 19-20).

The European Values Study 1981-1990 has suggested that freedom is "highly rated . . . across Europe" and there is "a searching for a 'pedagogy of freedom'. This is a striving towards an increased moral autonomy for individual people and a greater sense of personal identity." This pedagogy "should seek to develop a society in which enterprise,

autonomy, self-determination, and personal growth are valued." They argue that, "The future orientation of education is likely to be influenced by values which are concerned with matters such as 'enterprise', and participation in the processes of education which lead to greater autonomy for the individual and a greater sense of responsibility for their own future" (European Values Group 1992, 55-56). The approach to religious belief which occurred in collective worship in my sample schools was largely in line with this "pedagogy of freedom" with its emphasis on increasing self-definition rather than finding identity and purpose within an existing, given tradition, religious or otherwise.

Religious belief as private

All the teachers were emphatic that it was not the role of the school to favour one particular religion in the sense of regarding it as superior or more true than the others. All beliefs were to be afforded equal respect and seen as equally valid - at least as far as official school policy was regarded. This is in keeping with a simple view of liberalism which regards the State's role as establishing the conditions whereby individuals can follow their freely chosen religions - it is not the State's task to favour one or another. As Halstead (1996, 21) puts it:

> Typically, no one conception of the good life is favoured in liberalism, and a vast range of life-styles, commitments, priorities, occupational roles and life-plans form a marketplace of ideas within the liberal framework. . . . Liberalism makes an important distinction between the private and public domains . . . . Thus, for example, religion is seen as a private and voluntary matter for the individual . . . .

This privatising of religion (and its consequent marginalisation in public life) was reflected in a recent publication entitled, "Dare we speak of God in public?" in which the contributors (all academic theologians) sought "to explore and analyse . . . why 'God-language' has become problematic and theology sidelined" (Young ed. 1995, 2). The present situation was described in the following way:

> It is well known that Government circles in the 1980s insisted that religion should be kept out of politics, consigning it to the sphere of private morality and personal faith. Probably the vast majority of people in our society, believers and non-believers alike, treat religion in such terms: it is a matter of individual choice or temperament, and has no bearing on public or professional life. In a pluralist society, tolerance and

> respect are seen as appropriate for the adherents of different religious positions: but the generally accepted fact is that religion is irrelevant, indeed potentially divisive, unable to contribute to the apprehension of truth about the way things are, and so best bracketed out of the machinery that deals with the public interest. (p.1)

McLaughlin (1995b, 26-27) has provided a careful analysis of the distinction between public and private values which is so central to liberalism. He comments:

> The broad theory of liberalism draws a distinction between public and private values . . . . Public values are those which, in virtue of their fundamentality or inescapability, are seen as binding on all persons. Frequently embodied in law, and expressed in terms of rights, they include such matters as basic social morality and, in democratic societies, a range of fundamental democratic principles such as freedom of speech and justice. Public values in such societies also include ideals such as personal autonomy and the maximisation of the freedom of individuals to pursue their fuller conception of the good within a framework of justice . . . . The liberal project is to specify a range of public values, free from significantly controversial assumptions and judgements, which can generate principles for the conduct of relations between people who disagree [on other matters].

McLaughlin is well aware that this division is a complex and contested one, but argues that it is useful and can be justified. He maintains that in the area of "'common', 'universal', or 'public' matters education seeks to achieve a strong, substantial influence on the beliefs of pupils and on their wider development as persons", whilst on "'diverse', 'particular', or 'non-public' matters, education seeks to achieve a principled forbearance of influence: it seeks not to shape either the beliefs or the personal qualities of pupils in the light of any substantial or 'comprehensive' conception of the good which is significantly controversial. Instead, education is either silent about such matters or encourages pupils to come to their own reflective decision about them." (McLaughlin 1995a, 241). This description generally reflects the manner in which the teachers in my sample acted with regard to religious belief although, as we saw in the results chapters, the reality is far more complex because the teachers were deeply influenced in their approach to collective worship in many subtle and implicit ways by their own beliefs, and were not nearly so thoroughly consistent as McLaughlin's account.

McLaughlin admits that the concept of 'public values' is highly complex and several important questions need to be asked:

> Is the basic theory itself based on a substantial or 'comprehensive' conception of the good which can be justified against alternatives, or rather on a pragmatic consensus or *modus vivendi*? How 'thick' and extensive are the common or 'public' values, and what is their relationship to the 'non-public' domain? What influence can the public domain legitimately have over its 'non-public' counterpart? (1995a, 242)

We might add the question, 'What influence do the variety of 'non-public' beliefs have on 'public' ones?' The teachers in my sample seemed to be operating on an assumption that the division between public and private values was a relatively straightforward matter: liberal education and the school ethos belonged to the former category and religious belief to the latter. However, the tensions which some of them were feeling in the context of collective worship (as described in the results chapters) illustrated that the situation is not so simple and a deeper analysis is necessary if an adequate basis for collective worship is to be found.

One possible line of development is given by McLaughlin (1995a, 245-247) when he suggests that "the character of the common school cannot be read in detail directly from liberal principles alone, but must be forged in, and be supported by, a debate and consensus about the cultural basis on which its work proceeds." He suggests a basis for such a process by citing Walzer's distinction between "Liberalism 1" which has a strong commitment to "individual rights" and "also to a 'rigorously neutral state'" (e.g. the United States); and "Liberalism 2" which "provides for a state 'committed to the survival and flourishing of a particular nation, culture, or religions, . . . so long as the basic rights of citizens who have different commitments or no such commitments at all are protected'" (e.g. Norway). One cannot avoid the feeling that such a division involves special pleading on behalf of the majority culture, and will inevitably discriminate against minorities. McLaughlin distinguishes between: "the basic or non-negotiable norms which articulate the framework of a liberal democratic society"; the "'default' norms" that are "part of an initial culture which is open to criticism and challenge: what is 'taken for granted', as a starting point"; and contestable and disputed 'non-public' values. He draws two main conclusions from this discussion of the complexity of the public/private distinction. The first is that:

> In controversial matters . . . schools face the task of working out in concrete terms how to proceed in a way which combines as far as possible broad acceptability to public opinion with conformity to liberal principles. Schools need help in this from a wide-ranging debate within the societies in which they are located, which seeks to address the issues clearly and achieve consensus about practical strategies and approaches for the handling on controversial issues. (p.247)

Given the complexity, controversiality and problematic nature of collective worship it is grossly unfair on teachers to expect them to come up with workable solutions. The wider debate has, so far, only floundered, but it is imperative that it continues because new ways of handling collective worship do need to be found.

McLaughlin's second conclusion is that "schools have an obligation to ensure that pupils not only become committed to the 'public' values, but that they also become aware of their proper character, and, in particular, their scope." (p.248). He is concerned that schools might, by default, be promoting a secular, relativist, view of life and an ideal of tolerance and respect which smooths away substantial areas of disagreement between differing comprehensive theories of the good. There was considerable evidence in my sample that precisely this was occurring on a wide scale which underlines McLaughlin's call for common schools to address the complexity of the issues in order to produce a more coherent approach (p.252).

Religious belief as subjective

The schools in my sample all, in effect, adopted a policy which did not allow for a decision between world-views to be taken on rational grounds. There was a general assumption of an over-arching rationality which had its paradigm in scientific and mathematical method (i.e. emphasised empiricism and logic) and applied in many areas of the curriculum. However, when it came to differences in world-views as expressed in collective worship, the teachers not only always avoided making evaluative comments, but also made a point of affirming the diversity, giving the impression that choices in these matters could not be made on objective grounds.

Several teachers contrasted matters of historical or scientific 'fact' with religious 'opinion'. In taking this stance they were adopting the classic liberal view as expressed by Hirst (1974, 173ff) and adopted in Schools' Council 'Working Paper No. 36', which was elucidated in chapter 6 . This division between 'fact' and 'opinion' is deeply contested. As MacIntyre (1988, 357-8) puts it:

> Facts, like telescopes and wigs for gentlemen, were a seventeenth-century invention . . . . What is and was not harmless, but highly misleading, was to conceive of a realm of facts independent of judgement or of any other form of linguistic expression, so that judgements or statements or sentences could be paired off with facts, truth or falsity being the alleged relationship between such paired items.

Philosophers of science have become increasingly aware that there is no such thing as a neutral description of the 'bare facts'. All description is theory laden. Newbigin (1990, 95ff) has also attacked the division between facts and values as an artificial and unsatisfactory one. He comments, "The work of historians and philosophers of science has surely shown conclusively that the attempt to draw an absolute boundary between science as what we all know, and religion as what some of us believe, is futile. Both science and religion claim to give a true account of what is the case, and both involve faith commitments." He suggests that there is

> a very powerful educational lobby which considers it improper to teach children the Christian faith in public schools, and claims rather to offer . . . an objective and critical view of all the religious and non-religious stances for living. This programme, of course, conceals from the children's sight a whole range of assumptions on which such a critical view rests. It denies to the children the possibility of criticizing that. The facts about the world's religions can be taught because they form part of knowledge. It is a fact that people have religious beliefs. But the things religious people believe are not facts. They may not be taught, because they are not knowledge but belief. (p.97)

Newbigin does not agree with this division between knowledge and belief. He claims, "The Church exists as witness to certain beliefs about what is the case, about facts, not values. This view is excluded from the realm of public truth as taught to children in public schools." (p98).

My point here is not to argue the pros and cons of either Newbigin's or MacIntyre's analysis, but merely to point out that the popular idea that there is 'clear water' between

facts and opinions/beliefs/values is hotly contested, and yet it underpins many teachers' approaches to the issue of religious belief in the context of collective worship. Their view seems based on a naive rational liberalism, which holds to the objectivity of scientific knowledge as the paradigm for all knowing. There are many who would hold that there are substantive issues at stake between faiths and these can be discussed on rational grounds - even if there are varying conceptions of rationality as MacIntyre (1988) argues.

Religious belief as relative

The manner in which collective worship was carried out suggested an implicit relativism. Many of the teachers were explicit about this and regarded all religions as equally valid. In some cases this was an ***ethical*** viewpoint which regarded all people as worthy of equal regard and respect which had become an ***epistemological*** view concerning the equal validity of all religious beliefs. It is easy to see the attractiveness of this view in a situation of many apparently competing religious faiths where disagreements are notorious and intractable and there is no apparently neutral way of solving the problem. Religious relativism absolves the teacher from having to say any one religion is better than any other.

For some of the teachers this view was based on a belief that the different faiths really were alternative routes to the same final reality. Hick is one of the best known theologians who has tried to develop a genuinely pluralist theology which is also realist. He builds his theology on the basis of a Kantian-type distinction between the "Real in itself" and the "Real as humanly thought-and-experienced". The former is simply postulated as a presupposition of religious experience. All religious experience is then penultimate. His pluralistic hypothesis is that

> the great world faiths embody different perceptions of and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real from within the major variant ways of being human; and that within each of them the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness is taking place. These traditions are accordingly to be regarded as alternative soteriological 'spaces' within which, or 'ways' along which, men and women can find salvation/liberation/ultimate fulfilment. (Hick 1989, 240)

Hick pays considerable attention to the problems of conflicting truth-claims and whether or not one religion can be considered as superior to another. He uses the idea of the mythical character of religious discourse. He says, "Religious traditions . . . . have developed a variety of mental pictures which seek to express the inexpressible in humanly imaginable ways . . . ." (p.355) and he later comments that:

> If such mythologies were construed as literal discourse, offering factual hypotheses, they would conflict with one another. But understood mythologically the truthfulness of each consists in its aptness, as part of an unique complex of life, thought and imagination, to forward the soteriological process. They belong to different universes of discourse, or operate within different mythic spaces, and their capacity to promote the salvific human transformation can only be measured in the context of the religious totalities to which they belong. (p.359)

He identifies three levels of conflicting truth claims: matters of historical fact which "can only be settled by an unbiased assessment of the historical evidence" (p.364); issues of "trans-historical fact" (p.365), e.g. life after death, about which we cannot know the answer and have to learn to live with differences; and different stories or pictures professing to answer the ultimate questions about the nature of the Real and about the source and destiny of humanity whose "truth or validity . . . lies in their soteriological effectiveness" (p.373).

Space does not permit a proper critique of Hick's views other than to say that it is an extremely sophisticated pluralist, realist theology which avoids a naive relativism by its use of the distinction between the 'noumenal' and the 'phenomenal', the concept of myth, and the criterion of soteriological efficacy. As such it would provide a firm theological underpinning of the understanding of religious belief which is implicit in much collective worship. One of the problems with this is that it is certainly not what many of the teachers actually believe themselves. Some would be horrified to think that they were effectively putting forward such unashamedly pluralist notions. The difficulty the teachers face is that the liberal paradigm within which most of them are working almost inexorably leads them in a relativist direction - to an effective presumption of relativism even if this is not intended. McLaughlin has pointed out that liberalism need not necessarily slide into

relativism. He comments concerning non-public values, in which he includes religious beliefs:

> One danger which the common school must avoid is that of promoting a relativist view of such values. The view that certain issues are significantly controversial, and that they ultimately require assessment by individuals, is importantly distinct from an acceptance of relativism. Beyond noting that reasonable 'non-public' values are significantly controversial, liberalism is silent about their truth and falsity. (McLaughlin 1995a, 251)

However, it is one thing for a philosopher of education to point out this distinction in theory, but my data suggests that in practice the schools go down the relativist road.

Hill (1990, 126ff), in a consideration of whether or not multi-faith approaches to religious studies foster religious relativism, describes what he sees as the logical conditions necessary to prevent "an inherent religious relativism in our presentation of religious materials" (p.132). He suggests that this involves going beyond a "merely descriptive knowledge of the diversity of religious faiths and practices" (p.132) by recognizing the central place in religions of exclusive truth-claims, and by developing pupils' "ability to weigh up such claims critically" and encouraging "the dispositions to make an informed decision about the part, if any, which religion will play in their own lives." (p.132). He points out that, "It would be dishonest . . . to pretend that all religions are equally multi-racial and egalitarian in their messages, equally comprehensive and consistent in their intellectual systematisations, or equally ameliorative in their concern for temporal social justice. They are not." (p.132). His solution for avoiding an inherent relativism is to follow what he calls an "impartial exemplary" teaching strategy, which encourages critical reflection, but allows the teacher to reveal his personal beliefs if appropriate. By doing this he believes that he has given a set of guidelines which "avoid a pre-emptive bias towards either religious relativism or religious absolutism in one's approach" (p.135). Hill's suggestions have much to commend them but, of course, they are directed at the context of teaching religious studies. With collective worship it is much more difficult to bring out the deeply embedded nature of the conflicting truth-claims, or for the teacher to profess their own belief without appearing to take advantage of a situation in which there

is no effective dialogue between teacher and taught. The deep desire of teachers for assembly to be an inclusive occasion means that they deliberately avoid areas of conflict. This means the danger of an inherent relativism is very real in collective worship and my data suggests that it is widespread.

Religious belief as pragmatic

Many teachers seemed to suggest that what really mattered about a person's religious belief was the effects it had in their life. The key question was not, 'Is it true?', but 'Does it work?' This focus on the efficacy of religious belief can be related to the 'pragmatic' theory of truth as classically espoused, for example, by James (1908) as described in chapter one.

Many others have developed this idea that the central feature of religious beliefs is to be found in their practical effects rather than in their cognitive truth. Some see the ***moral effects*** as the most important. Braithwaite (1971) argued that religious assertions are essentially an intention to act in a certain way and the association of this intention with a particular set of religious stories whose function is to reinforce the intention. Phillips (1968) argues that the criteria for evaluating the truth of a religious belief are to be found in the way it regulates the believer's life. Cupitt (1984, 19) argued, as detailed above, that religious beliefs "guide lives rather than describe facts. . . . Their 'truth' is not descriptive or factual truth, but the truth about the way they work out in our lives. They are to be acted upon." Hick (1989) can be seen as tending in this direction with his criterion of 'soteriological efficacy' to evaluate between religions (see above). Others, notably Durkheim (1915, 415ff), see the ***community building effect*** of religious belief as of great importance as well, as explained above. Yet others focus on the ***psychological effects*** of belief as being central. For example, Bellah (1976) has argued that the identification of religious belief with cognitive propositions was a temporary Western abberation going back to Plato; the East showed little such tendency. For Bellah a far more important role

for religion is the provision of meaning and motivation for a person's life. Credal statements and metaphysical beliefs are secondary; the key is the search for self-fulfilment.

There was much in my data to suggest that this pragmatic aspect of religious belief was central to many of the teachers' approaches, at least in the context of collective worship if not in their own personal beliefs. Of course, this emphasis has the great advantage that it avoids the problem of competing cognitive truth claims given that the 'truth' of a belief is found in its efficacy in an individual's life. There are at least two problems with this approach: firstly, how we define efficacy; and secondly, the question of 'effective,' 'false' beliefs - e.g. someone might live a very contented life in the (mistaken) belief that they were, say, King of England.

There is not room within this study for a proper evaluation of this pragmatic approach to religious belief other than to note that it is an important interpretation which many theologians and philosophers have sought to defend and explicate; and it plays a substantial role in the approach to religious belief which underlies collective worship in my sample of schools.

The current prevailing orthodoxy

I suggested in chapter two, on the basis of a survey of the literature and the manifold guidelines on collective worship, that there was "an emerging orthodoxy and orthopraxis in the early 1990s," which was *sui generis,* educational, and inclusive, reflected perceived common values and school ethos, and based on a 'worth-ship' view of collective worship. My research has led to the conclusion that this orthodoxy is operating in a powerful way in all my sample schools - the only one which is significantly different is the Catholic school, but even this was much influenced by this orthodoxy.

My data has led to the conclusion that underlying this 'orthodoxy and orthopraxis' is a view of religious belief which sees it as ***an individually chosen, private, practical guide***

to living. In the terminology of 'grounded theory' this is my core category. Its key properties have been described above, and its relationship to the four main themes have been analysed in the relevant results chapter. To summarise, each of the four main themes has particular consequences (some of which overlap) for the understanding of religious belief and its 'truth'. ***Inclusivity*** led to religious belief being treated as private (marginal to public life), subjective, and relative. ***Personal integrity and freedom of choice*** led to its being treated as individual and private, personally chosen and constructed, subjective, pragmatic and relative. ***The tendency to locate the heart of collective worship in moral exhortation, individual reflection and personal spirituality, and in 'worthship' rather than in traditional worship*** led to religious belief being treated in a private, individual and relative manner, often pluralist in character. Sometimes also this led to the idea that there was a universal experiential core in religions, or that they were really disguised moral intentions reflecting a widespread belief in an absolute common moral code. ***The powerful influence and leeway of the individual teacher in collective worship*** underlined the private/public distinction, and led to the real possibilty of the moulding and manipulating of the views and approaches put forward under the umbrella of collective worship - they could become the enthusiasms, prejudices and views of the teachers.

This approach to collective worship, which I have labelled the 'current orthodoxy and orthopraxis,' and its consequences for the understanding of religious belief, can be seen as being built on a combination of Webster's 'interfaith' and 'secularized' models of collective worship with the former encouraging sympathy and understanding of different faiths, and the latter stressing religious belief as a matter for private, individual choice. We should note, however, that there were a small number of teachers for whom Webster's 'modified Christian' model with its emphasis on nurture was nearer the mark (Webster 1990).

All of Hill's epistemologies were present, but the main emphasis was on the 'literal persuasive', the 'quasi-literal persuasive' and the 'mythical persuasive' (Hill 1990). In

terms of Byrne's typology of religious belief, mentioned in chapter one, the predominant types were pluralism and relativism, but examples of essentialism, syncretism, confessionalism and neutralism (in virtue of the avoidance of evaluative comments) were also to be found on occasion. There was little tendency to promote naturalistic interpretations of religion in the context of collective worship.

We can also see the approach to religious belief underlying collective worship as lying primarily within a liberal, rationalist framework. McLaughlin (1992, 240) describes this as follows:

> Central to liberalism is the phenomenon of the existence in society of diversities in belief, practice and value, to which it is seen as a response. Given fundamental disagreement about substantial or 'thick' conceptions of human good or perfection, (for example, religious views which provide a comprehensive account of human life and how it should be lived), liberalism holds that no such conception can be imposed on citizens of a pluralist society or invoked to characterise and underpin the notion of the public good. What is needed for this purpose is a 'thin' conception of the good, free of significantly controversial assumptions and judgements, which maximises the freedom of citizens to pursue their diverse private conceptions of the good within a framework of justice. . . . The label 'thin' here refers not to the insignificance of such values, but to their independence from substantial, particular, frameworks of belief and value.

Despite the privileged place of Christianity in the 1988 ERA, most of the teachers did not want to be seen to be favouring Christianity in the sense of implying it is superior to other faiths and world-views. What was central was the emphasis on each individual's freedom of choice, the need for mutual respect and understanding of diverse views, the stress on a common moral framework which allowed this diversity to live together in a harmonious manner - i.e. core liberal values or what McLaughlin describes as a 'thin' conception of the good. A multiplicity of 'private' views of the good life was not only tolerated, it was seen as something to be celebrated and affirmed as adding richness and colour to life and as increasing the choices open to each individual to fashion their lives as they will. However, there are many problems with this liberal framework and it is seriously inadequate as a basis for collective worship in county schools. The next section looks at these issues.

THE CRUMBLING LIBERAL PARADIGM

There are many critiques of liberalism. They come from a variety of perspectives, most of which have their own (different) philosophy of education. I have already described some of the Muslim (Halstead and Khan-Cheema 1987, Muslim Educational Forum 1997), Christian (Newbigin 1989, Thiessen 1993, Wright 1993, Cooling 1994), postmodern (Usher and Edwards 1994), conservative (Tate 1996), and philosophical (Polanyi 1958, MacIntyre 1988, Gill 1992, Sacks 1991 & 1995) critiques. There is enough in these arguments to make us realise that liberalism is struggling to retain its hegemonic position in an increasingly plural and postmodern world. More and more people are arguing that it is properly seen as one world-view among many and, as such, its view of religious belief should be treated accordingly. McLaughlin (1992, 240) has suggested that liberalism rests on a core of non-contested public values: it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify what these might be as society becomes more plural in character.

Key issues in the collective worship debate which depend on the liberal paradigm

Many of the key issues in the current collective worship debate depend crucially on the liberal framework for their validity. These issues are often seen very differently from within other world-views. There are at least four such issues.

The first of these is the distinction between knowledge and belief. The beginning of modern philosophy is often traced back to Descartes with his emphasis on the individual thinking person and his quest for certain knowledge. The shift that took place in the West from the mediaeval period to the Enlightenment was from a reliance on the Bible and Christian Tradition as the primary foundation of true knowledge to a reliance on our sensory experience and logical rational thinking. There arose a powerful belief that there was one form of rationality with which every human being, if they were thinking aright, would agree. The impact of the rise of science in the seventeenth century was colossal and strongly reinforced this trend. Very crudely speaking this trend reached its philosphical zenith in the Logical Positivist school of thought, as exemplified by Ayer

(1936) who consigned all moral, aesthetic and religious language to the realm of subjective opinion. The paradigms for knowledge were mathematics with its reliance on logic, and science with its reliance on sensory experience and rational thought. The meaning and reliability of the interpretation of sense data has been much discussed by philosophers and there are different schools of thought on how this is to be seen (realists/idealists), but there can be little doubt that in the modern Western world the paradigm of knowlege has been very substantially influenced by science and empiricism. We have already discussed Hirst's understanding of the nature of knowledge and its impact on education in the 1960s and beyond.

There are many who have disputed this sharp division. I have already mentioned MacIntyre and Newbigin, both of whom dispute the clear division between 'facts' and 'opinions'. Polanyi (1958), in an inquiry into the nature and justification of scientific knowledge started "by rejecting the ideal of scientific detachment" which "falsifies our whole outlook far beyond the domain of science." He argued against the idea that true knowledge is "impersonal, universally established, objective" - rather, he suggested "all acts of understanding" involve the "*personal participation* of the knower." This does not lead to an arbitrary subjectivity; he says, "Comprehension is neither an arbitrary act nor a passive experience, but a responsible act claiming universal validity. Such knowing is indeed *objective* in the sense of establishing contact with a hidden reality . . . . It seems reasonable to describe this fusion of the personal and the objective as Personal Knowledge." (pp. vii-viii).

Arthur (1995, 47), writing from a Roman Catholic perspective says:

> Faith and human knowledge need to be integrated so that religious truth informs the whole of life and understanding. Education is not simply the application of secular knowledge to a secular world; on the contrary, the Church insists that truth and human knowledge are in profound harmony, so that all knowledge and understanding is touched and transformed by the truths about human beings and God which are taught by faith. The embodiment of this vision is the purpose of Catholic education.

The division between knowledge and belief is subsumed under a broader total view of life, as is the understanding of education. A similar attitude can be found in other religious viewpoints. For the purpose of this study we do not need to consider all the arguments about this division between knowledge and belief, but merely to note that in world-views other than the liberal rationalist one this division is often not so clear.

The second issue which depends on the liberal, rationalist framework is the public/private distinction. Wright (1998) traces important strands of the liberal position back to Locke, who stressed the fact that what we can know with certainty (from our sense experiences) is relatively little: we depend for most of our living and behaviour on contingent beliefs and opinions (and, for Locke, religious beliefs fall into this category). The question then arises as to how people of diverse views are to live together harmoniously. Wright suggests that "Locke's liberalism flows equally from his philosophical theory and political practice." Mid-seventeenth century England was confronted with many deep and conflicting religious views. Locke's solution was to develop the distinction between private religious belief and public policy. This view was born out of conflict primarily as an ethical view on how competing convictions might live together peacefully, although it was also, as we have noted, dependent upon Locke's epistemology.

However, there are at least two main problems with this distinction today. The first is that many religious people simply do not accept that their religious belief is confined to their private lives. For them it is a total viewpoint which affects all areas of life. This suggests that the public/private division depends on the liberal framework. The second problem is that what began life as an ***ethical view*** has hardened into an ***epistemological theory***. Mutual respect and tolerance for different religious views does not necessarily mean that they need all be regarded as equally valid interpretations of experience and there is no way of choosing rationally between them. Wright (1998) argues that liberal RE has been built on liberalism as a "comprehensive world-view committed to its own distinctive beliefs and morality" and this has tended to suppress consideration of

conflicting truth-claims which are central to religious traditions, and so produces religiously illiterate pupils who do not understand the nature of these faiths. What is needed to avoid this "imperialistic liberal discourse," he suggests, is that we should recognise the "existence of a plurality of perspectives", and encourage "open debate between alternative liberal and non-liberal traditions." This means shifting from a 'hard' understanding of liberalism as a total world-view to a "soft notion of liberalism as an interim political ethic," which is much more in line with Locke's original intention. He sees the "true battle ahead" as "between soft and hard forms of liberalism: between a liberalism that has come of age and a liberalism still struggling with its adolescent identity." Again, the key point to note for my study is that the private/public distinction depends on the liberal framework.

The third issue in the collective worship debate which depends on the liberal rationalist framework is the sharp distinction between education and nurture. Most of the teachers in my sample had a very strong fear of indoctrination. They saw themselves as educators in the sense that their aim was to produce independent, rational, free-thinking people who would make their own well-informed choices in such disputed areas as religion and some areas of morality. They should be free as individuals to fashion their lives according to their own choices. Freedom of choice was the highest good in this schema, not any sense of choosing the 'right' or the 'true'. In other words, there was no common sense of what the 'good life' might mean: it was taken for granted that a multiplicity of views existed. Now as a matter of empirical fact this is undoubtedly true. However, this freedom of choice which begins as an ethical view can, and very often did in my sample, become an effective epistemology which suggests that there really are no rational grounds for choosing one view rather than another. But this is an example of the 'hard liberalism' of which Wright (1998) spoke. When seen from other viewpoints you certainly can evaluate between different conceptions of the good life, albeit on grounds that are internal to that world-view. The devout Muslim is in little doubt that his belief is right. As mentioned in chapter one, traditional understandings of education see the primary function of education

as being to pass on received wisdom and knowledge to the next generation. If you hold that a view gives real insight into the truth of the matter in some absolute sense, then the purpose of education is to help the pupil to gain that insight. Thiessen (1993) has given a detailed defence of religious nurture against the charge of indoctrination, partly by giving a critique of the prevailing view of liberal education. He suggests that we need a new ideal of liberal education based on a more open recognition of basic underlying beliefs. This would lead to a greater diversity of schooling given the plurality of belief-systems, of which liberalism is only one.

The fourth issue dependent on the liberal framework is the great emphasis on the individual as the primary unit at the expense of any conception of community. However many are now pointing to the importance of the community in moral and personal education. (e.g. MacIntyre 1988, Gill 1992, Sacks 1991 & 1995). The ideas of a free-floating, neutral individual who is given basic information and then takes a 'free' decision about basic beliefs and commitments is a myth. People are formed in communities - families, faiths, and others - which have their own traditions into which the individual is nurtured. Of course, at a later stage any given person can decide to reject the traditions of their nurturing community, but everyone is part of some such community - and liberal education itself is one such tradition of beliefs.

The end of the liberal paradigm?

The roots of liberalism were in a context of seventeenth century conflict between competing religious views - and in the fear of the fragmentation and wars which ensued. It has been enormously successful in providing a framework for diversity. However, it has increased its scope from a primarily ethical stance to an all-embracing world-view which has difficulty accepting the challenges of non-liberal traditions to its very fabric. Liberalism has provided the basis for public education and it is strongly reflected in, for example, the Swann Report of 1985. My data has shown that it is still the dominant influence on teachers in their approach to religious belief in the context of collective

worship. In many respects they reflect the multicultural approach of the Swann Report which stressed the equal validity of different world-views.

For the reasons given above it looks increasingly unlikely that the liberal framework, certainly in its 'hard' format, will be adequate for today's plural and postmodern world. Several writers have suggested that we are at a point of transition when a new paradigm will be needed, akin to Kuhn's notion of a paradigm shift in science when a whole new conceptual system is needed to account for a radically different situation (Kuhn 1962). Sacks (1991, 20), writing from a Jewish perspective, claimed:

> We are nearing the end of a period in human civilisation in which there seemed to be no limits to individual choice and collective reason. Traditions had been deconstructed and technical reason took their place. Ends were things individually chosen, and the machinery of science and government provided the means. Within this promethean vision, religion could lead at most a diminishing and marginal existence.
> But already this social and intellectual world has lost its plausibility. Enlightenment ended in Holocaust. . . .
> We are caught between two ages, one passing, the other not yet born, and the conflicting tendencies we witness - deepening secularisation on the one hand, new religious passions on the other - are evidence of the transition.

Sacks is in no doubt that the liberal vision of pluralism in which "society is a neutral arena of private choices where every vision of the good carries its own credentials of authority" (p.88) is not only no longer adequate in today's world, but also deeply damaging to the fabric of society; and so he offers his own vision of plurality which I shall describe in the next section.

Usher and Edwards (1994) are concerned with insights from postmodernism, despite the difficulty they admit of accurately characterising the term. They say:

> We take the view that education is itself going through profound change in terms of purposes, content and methods. These changes are part of a process that, generally, questions the role of education as the child of the Enlightenment. Consequently, education is currently the site of conflict and part of the stakes in that conflict. (p.3)

Part of the reason for this change is that:

> Education does not fit easily into the postmodern moment because educational theory and practice is founded in the modernist tradition. Education is very much the dutiful

> child of the Enlightenment and, as such, tends to uncritically accept a set of assumptions deriving from Enlightenment thought. Indeed it is possible to see education as the vehicle by which the Enlightenment ideals of critical reason, humanistic individual freedom and benevolent progress are substantiated and realised. (p. 24)

Amongst other things, postmodernism challenges the concepts of the self, rationality, and objective knowledge - all of which are central to liberal education.

Wright (1998) speaks of the need to move from a "hard liberalism-as-world-view" to a "soft form of liberalism-as-interim-ethic": the former he described as a "liberalism still struggling with its adolescent identity," and the latter as a "liberalism come of age." The main point to note from all these writers is the suggestion that the classic liberal paradigm of education will no longer meet the needs of a genuinely plural and postmodern education.

The evidence from my data suggests that teachers are still working within this paradigm as far as collective worship goes, but it involves them personally in very considerable tensions as already described. I take this to be supportive evidence for the contention that a new framework of understanding is needed if the collective worship debate is to move on. It is insoluble on the basis of liberalism and recent efforts to find a way forward have inevitably floundered (e.g. 'Collective Worship Reviewed' - R.E. Council of England and Wales et al 1998).

THE WAY FORWARD - A NEW PLURAL, CRITICAL REALIST PARADIGM

In this final section I shall, on the basis of my data and its analysis, suggest some of the characteristics which will be needed by a new paradigm for education that will be adequate to cope with the issues raised by the current practice of collective worship in schools.

A genuinely plural paradigm

A new paradigm needs to live openly and honestly with deep differences of view. Some world-views profoundly disagree with the consigning of fundamental beliefs to a notional 'private', individual sphere as the Muslim and Catholic understandings of education show very clearly. This would entail a proper recognition that there are different 'rationalities' rather than one over-arching objective, context-free 'Rationality' as posited by Enlightenment liberalism (MacIntyre 1988, Usher and Edwards 1994, 27).

This means that different traditions and rationalities will each have to develop their own understanding of pluralism as, for example, Hick (1989) and many others have attempted from within the Christian tradition. This is no 'optional extra', but a central and urgent task facing any tradition which sees itself as offering an understanding of human life. It must be able to give a coherent account of how it relates to other, possibly competing, traditions.

Part of this understanding of pluralism must be a sophisticated account of the relationship between the absolute claims of a tradition and the relativising tendency of a plural context. What is the nature of absolute commitments in a plural situation? How do we avoid a hard, exclusive fundamentalism on the one hand, and an easy-going, all-embracing relativism on the other? Sacks (1991, 105-6) points to the need for a plural theology which avoids both liberalism and fundamentalism and is such that "religions can be both faithful to their traditions and answerable to the imperative of tolerance." Hart (1995, 90ff) seeks to find a basis for Christian theology which finds a way between an over-confident objectivism and an agnostic relativism. O'Leary (1996) brings ideas from both the Buddhist and Christian traditions together with insights from postmodern philosophers to consider the questions, 'How true are the great religions?' and 'How are they true?' He argues that theology must be 'phenomenological' - rooted in experience, 'pluralistic' - open to diversity, and 'rational'. He comments:

> All three approaches are concerned with truth. The first is concerned with the 'truth of revelation'. . . . The second attempts to show that within the always limited and

> contingent horizons of a pluralistic religious universe it is possible for a discourse to refer objectively to an absolute truth or truths, though this truth can never be . . . formulated independently of the interplay between divergent discourses. The third will focus more sharply on the ultimate rational justification for maintaining religious claims . . . . (O'Leary 1996, xii)

O'Leary provides a sophisticated attempt to grapple with these issues, and there are many others undertaking a similar task. The point to be made from my study is not to evaluate these attempts, but to say that they are essential for providing a satisfactory basis for collective worship in schools.

A paradigm which emphasises the importance of communities, traditions of faith and fiduciary frameworks

I have already cited the work of MacIntyre (1988), Gill (1992) and Sacks (1991) all of whom stress the importance of traditions and continuing communities. This is in contrast with the liberal myth of isolated, free, autonomous individuals who are being given the wherewithal to make their choices and so shape their lives 'from scratch' beginning with a 'blank sheet'. We are all formed in some community or another which will have its own particular traditions, norms, values and beliefs. Mitchell (1994, 357ff) expresses the balance needed between the nurturing community and the individual when he asks, "Can the individual learn to be either critical or creative without first having been inducted into a continuing tradition of some kind?" He quotes Gilbert Murray to summarise his view:

> Every man who possesses real vitality can be seen as the resultant of two forces. He is first the child of a particular age, society, convention; of what we may call in one word a tradition. He is, secondly, in one degree or another, a rebel against that tradition. And the best traditions make the best rebels. (quoted by Mitchell 1994, 358)

Two notes of caution need to be added here. Firstly, are we to assume that traditions have an integrity to them and do not have fuzzy edges or porous boundaries? In today's postmodern world it is often suggested that a profound eclectism is at work which allows people to borrow from different traditions to build their own. Secondly, it is not obvious of which traditions or communities any given person is a part. Might not the typical

school pupil be a member of several communities, each with their own language and rationality?

Just as MacIntyre has drawn attention to the socially-embodied character of traditions of rationality and so undermined the liberal concept of the autonomous rational individual, so Polanyi (1958) has pointed out the need for a 'fiduciary framework' within which to operate. Complete scepticism is not possible; we have to take some things for granted if we are to know anything. The ideal of detached, certain, objective knowledge is a chimera. Polanyi (1958, 265) says:

> When the supernatural authority of laws, churches and sacred texts had waned or collapsed, man tried to avoid the emptiness of mere self-assertion by establishing over himself the authority of experience and reason. But it has now turned out that modern scientism fetters thought as cruelly as ever the churches had done. It offers no scope for our most vital beliefs and it forces us to disguise them in farcically inadequate terms.

Polanyi suggests that Locke's sharp distinction between empirically and rationally demonstrable knowledge and subjective faith which had no such certainty was deeply unsatisfactory:

> We must now recognize belief once more as the source of all knowledge. Tacit assent and intellectual passions, the sharing of an idiom and of a cultural heritage, affiliation to a like-minded community: such are the impulses which shape our vision of the nature of things on which we rely for our mastery of things. No intelligence, no matter how critical or original, can operate outside such a fiduciary framework. (Polanyi 1958, 266)

He turns back to Augustine's maxim *'nisi credideritis, non intelligitis'* to provide a more satisfactory basis for knowledge than Cartesian scepticism and Enlightenment Rationalism. We need some basic beliefs or 'fiduciary framework' within which to operate and this needs to be made explicit. As Hart (1995, 69) expresses it:

> At the end of the day both objectivism and relativism founder on the same erroneous assumption; namely that it is possible to transcend one's particularity in an absolute manner, gaining access to a view of reality which is no-one's in particular, the view from nowhere.

The need for conversation and dialogue

Once we admit that people can belong to fundamentally different traditions of rationality or adopt varying 'fiduciary frameworks' we are opening the door to fragmentation and the inability to communicate with one another. The Enlightenment belief in an over-arching, universal, neutral, context-free rationality offered the tempting possibility of a language which all could learn and an authority which all would accept. However, as we have seen, this was to prove a false god. A new way of communication has to be found in a genuinely plural world in order to promote real respect, tolerance and understanding. The teachers in my sample were well aware of the crucial importance of this communication and worked hard to achieve a united school which recognised and celebrated its diverse components. There was a deep fear of fragmentation which led at times to a superficial approach to differences which tended to relativise them and avoid deep areas of conflict. In some respects this reduced the possibility of genuine understanding and communication between faith-traditions because it focused mainly on the similarities, or sought to place all traditions within a liberal, rational framework.

At a practical level, the CEM have produced a guide to inter-faith relations in schools which makes some important points. Firstly, "Each faith tradition sees itself as worthy of consideration in its own right rather than in terms of another" (CEM 1996, 4). Secondly, it recognises that there are disagreements over sources of authority and, therefore, "What we have to aim for is a respectful disagreement. . . . Telling each other's story . . . and listening to it." (pp34-35). It suggests that, "If the greater mingling of people of different faiths has brought their differences into sharper focus, it has also presented unparalleled opportunities for dialogue and real understanding." (p.38).

But more is needed than good intentions to listen respectfully. We need a proper understanding of how communication takes place between different groups and its underlying theory and purpose. Of course, each tradition will have to produce its own views on this matter. I have already mentioned the ideas of MacIntyre (1988) and Sacks

(1991 & 1995) both of whom use the analogy of speaking different languages: MacIntyre of learning a "second first language" and Sacks of speaking a "first language" of common citizenship and a "second language" of communal identity. Nipkow (1993) has also provided some useful insights. He distinguishes between a 'soft' pluralism which tends to look for universal solutions or a 'pluralistic supersystem' (common spiritual experience, similar religious praxis, overlapping elements, religions as many ways to the one God) and a 'hard' pluralism which stresses the incommensurability of different systems and their individual claims to ultimacy. He suggests that the former can end up as a dogmatic relativism which prescribes an ecumenical 'esperanto' that "will neither acknowledge the full, rich, authentic individual (religious) languages nor solve the problems of a 'hard' (religious) pluralism" (p.8). The latter presents the real danger of fragmentation and intolerance. His research among young people in Germany suggests that these issues are no longer central to them because they "no longer share such authentic religious experiences in specific religious communities" (p.8). They displayed an "***a priori* relativism**" which saw all religions as "mere variations of the one" (p.9) - the only thing that really mattered was the reality and meaning of 'God'. They also tended to "look at everything in the field of religion from a **functional** and a highly **individualised** perspective" (p.8). The former of these meant that they focused on the psychological and moral usefulness of religious beliefs, and the latter implied a "poignant **subjectivity**: 'God is for everyone what he or she believes God to be'" (p.8). This corresponds closely with the findings of my research which has suggested that religious belief is treated in a relative, subjective, individual and functional manner in the context of collective worship. The issue of conflicting truth claims is taking second place to the efficacy of faith. This has the effect of taking attention away from the need to translate and communicate between faiths and rationalities and focusing instead on the need for genuine understanding of what it means to follow a particular faith.

A concern for 'truth'

Does this mean that we should simply give up on the idea of 'realist' understandings of life which suggest that there is something 'beyond' our ideas and concepts to which we are trying, more or less successfully, to respond? Is the concept of 'truth' merely internal to a particular conceptual system, and the only thing that matters is whether or not it provides the individual with what they consider to be an satisfactory world-view? There are many who would argue that such an approach is profoundly unsatisfactory. Cardinal Hume (1998, 5) has said:

> There is . . . an attitude towards the truths of religion which can be very undermining. It is called relativism. Relativism does not simply say that the claims of religion are false. Instead, it attempts to short-circuit any discussion about truth. The relativist says 'There is no truth, there are only opinions. You do your thing; and I'll do mine." In the guise of tolerance it promotes indifference; in the guise of intellectual honesty, a radical irrationality. For there is no basis for argument and dialogue, or of explanation. Rival values, moral teachings, ideals and religions about what makes for human fulfilment and happiness are simply labelled like products on a shelf. You take your pick. Which way of life or religion you prefer becomes yet another consumer choice.

Hume, building on the recent papal encyclical 'Veritatis Splendor', calls for "a rediscovery of revelation - the ultimate truth which is disclosed to us of our origin and ultimate destiny."

There have been several calls for a greater prominence to be given in education to the concept of truth. Baelz (1995, 28) considers the tradition of university education and raises the problem of the view that all criteria of rationality and truth are culturally embedded. He concludes by saying, "Dare we suggest that our university today should strive to be a community that transmits from generation to generation what we may call 'the question of Truth'?" Orchard (1992, 3), coming from a Christian viewpoint, suggests that "the overall goal of education is immense, nothing less than the pursuit of ultimate truth." Watson (1987, 15) argues that education must involve the search for truth. Wright (1993, chapter 4) suggests that current RE tends to ignore the crucial question of the truth claims of religions and this is, in his view, highly unsatisfactory.

A concern for 'truth', even given all the difficulties involved, is an essential pillar of any satisfactory paradigm for collective worship. If this issue is marginalised, as has happened in the current practice of collective worship in my sample schools, it is very easy to fall into an implicit relativism and the consequence is often indifference to such questions.

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR COLLECTIVE WORSHIP AND EDUCATION IN GENERAL

A greater diversity of schooling

The myth of the neutral, common school can no longer be maintained. Schools which firmly embrace a hard, liberal ideology should be seen as one type of school amongst many. The fundamental beliefs and values on which the school is built need to be openly declared and this will lead to a greater diversity of schooling. The movement in this direction can be seen in many places. The government 'white paper' entitled 'Choice and Diversity' (DFE 1992, 1) affirmed this trend and the important place within the state sector of "voluntary schools provided by the churches and other voluntary bodies with their distinctive ethos and traditions." Muslim schools have recently been granted 'aided' status, and the Anglican schools are developing their distinctive identity further in a newly confident manner (Carey, Hope and Hall 1998). Usher and Edwards (1994, 210ff) have suggested that education for the "postmodern moment" should be

> more diverse in terms of goals and processes and consequently in terms of organisational structures, curricula, methods and participants. Education would 'take its cue' from the diverse cultural contexts in which it was located rather than from universal logocentric norms. Instead of seeking to reduce everything to the 'same' it would become instead the vehicle for the celebration of diversity, a space for different voices against the one authoritative 'voice' of modernity.

The schools in my sample did make a point of trying to celebrate diversity, but this was done within a framework of liberal rationalism rather than a plural framework.

Holmes (1992) sees the two main dangers facing common schools in plural cultures as, on the one hand, "centrifugalism and disintegration" if there is too much choice, and on the other hand a "bland common school" which has only a low level of ethos and tradition

and thereby appeals to no one. His solution is to maintain a "strong consensual program for the majority and dissenting schools for the minority" (p.128) as this will maintain the cohesion and central identity of society. The common schools should have certain basic features required of them, but they should also seek to develop their own distinctive ethos building on their own tradition and local circumstances - so, for example, religion could be a central feature of some common schools, or a particular cultural background.

The present situation with collective worship in schools is hopelessly compromised. On the one hand the 1988 ERA, combined with Circular 1/94 and the OFSTED inspection procedures, can seem to be a crude attempt to impose a cultural imperialism in a vain attempt to re-establish a past, apparently more homogeneous Christian society; on the other hand the legislative framework recognises the plurality of cultures and tries not to make evaluative comments about the validity of different faiths. The outworking of this in my sample schools is largely undertaken within a liberal, rationalist framework of education which itself imposes certain understandings of religious belief in an imperialistic manner. The only honest way forward is to accept a greater variety of schooling within the state system which would allow those schools which wished to adopt a secular, humanist ethos to do so openly; and similarly those which wanted to adopt a more religious ethos would be free to do so.

Education for a plural world

Wright (1998) points to the danger of producing "religiously illiterate" pupils if we avoid dealing with issues of competing truth-claims in RE. In my sample schools this was occurring on a large scale in collective worship. The danger with this approach to collective worship is that it leads almost inevitably to an unsatisfactory view of religious belief with the attendant dangers of indifference, a facile relativism which implies that religious choices do not matter, or an isolated individualism which idolises individual freedom and neglects the importance of community and tradition. Children deserve better than this if they are to be equipped to live in a plural world. Bolton (1997, 135) argues

that a phenomenological approach to religions is not sufficient. We must also ask, "Are all world-views equally valid?" and "give to children the tools of evaluation." He is not very clear about what those tools might be, but the point I support is the need to make evaluations about beliefs. A similar comment is made by Astley (1994, 287) when he considers the position of the Christian learner:

> For all educators the problem of *relativity* is an important issue. Whatever the content being taught, the Christian learner faces the challenge of an actually or potentially vast variety of viewpoints - a variety of "truths". Even if she comes to believe that there is one set of absolute truths underlying this variety, she must still learn how to cope with this variety herself, how to relate to other people of different persuasions, and how to educate others to live in a world of relativity.

The present arrangements for collective worship do not help children to live in a "world of relativity" (I prefer the term 'world of plurality') because too many substantial points of conflict are avoided and the whole activity takes place under the umbrella of liberal rationalism which leads inexorably to a highly unsatisfactory understanding of religious belief as described in this study. Under a veneer of neutrality children are being inducted into a tradition - that of liberalism and its view of religious belief. A new paradigm is needed along the lines described above if the issue of collective worship in schools is to find a way out of its present confusion.

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1

SAMPLE DETAILS - SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

N.B. (1) The first named teacher for each school acted as the 'gatekeeper' (see chapter 3) for that school unless stated otherwise.

(2) Teachers have been described as 'experienced' if they have been teaching for over 10 years, and as 'very experienced' if they have been teaching for over 25 years.

(3) All the schools which I approached readily agreed to take part in my research except two: one because the headteacher was retiring and did not want to commit her successor, and the other because the R.E. coordinator was on long-term sick leave. One of the reasons for this readiness to participate was that several of the schools were in the process of producing, or had just produced, a written policy on collective worship. Another reason was that recent 'Ofsted' reports on some of the schools had highlighted collective worship as an area for development. It was, therefore, a 'live issue' where the schools would welcome some input.

INFANT SCHOOLS (denoted by the letter 'I' in main text)

I1

School details

* county school
* age range 4 - 7
* 38% speak English as a second language, mostly Muslim and Hindu

Teacher details

I1.1 - very experienced infant teacher, Roman Catholic background

I1.2 - experienced teacher, practising Christian

I1.3 - nominal Christian background, "undecided" concerning personal religious belief

I2

School details

* county school

* age range 4-7

* 40% ethnic minority, approximately 30% Muslim, 10% Hindu

Teacher details

I2.1 - experienced teacher, Christian upbringing

I2.2 - experienced teacher

I2.3 - experienced teacher, practising Christian

JUNIOR SCHOOLS (denoted by the letter 'J' in the main text)

J1

School details

* county school

* age range 7-11

* almost entirely Muslim - either Bangladeshi or Pakistani backgrounds

* SACRE 'determination' granted

Teacher details

J1.1 - very experienced teacher, Christian background

J1.2 - very experienced teacher, practising Christian

J2

School details

* county school

* age range 7-11

* 35% ethnic minority, mostly Muslim - a few Hindu

Teacher details

J2.1 - very experienced teacher, strong multi-cultural background, practising Christian

J2.2 - experienced teacher, practising Christian

J2.3 - younger teacher, evangelical Christian

J3

School details

* county school

* age range 7-11

* at least 80% Muslim

* SACRE 'determination' granted

Teacher details

J3.1 - very experienced teacher, "committed member of the Jewish faith"

J3.2 - very experienced teacher, practising Christian

J3.3 - experienced teacher, Church of England upbringing, now a humanist

J4

School details

* county school

* age range 7-11

* 80 pupils out of 350 from ethnic minority backgrounds - mostly Muslim and Hindu. Approximately 8 Jehovah's Witnesses.

Teacher details

J4.1 - experienced teacher, no religious upbringing, now a practising Christian

J4.2 - experienced teacher, non-conformist upbringing, now a Humanist

J4.3 - experienced teacher, Quaker background

CHURCH JUNIOR SCHOOLS (denoted by the letters 'cJ' in the main text)

cJ1

School details

* voluntary aided (Church of England)

* age range 7-11

* approximately 10-15% are either Muslim, Hindu or Sikh

* approximately 20-30% of the children go to church regularly with their families

Teacher details

cJ1.1 - very experienced teacher, Christian upbringing, now "not prepared to wear a badge - following the teachings of Christ"

cJ1.2 - very experienced teacher, Church of England upbringing, now an "occasional church-goer"

cJ1.3 - Methodist upbringing, practising Christian

cJ1.4 - young teacher, agnostic, but sympathetic to religious belief

PRIMARY SCHOOLS (denoted by the letter 'P' in the main text)

School details

* county school

* age range 5-11

* 78% nominal Christian, 11% "no religion, 2.5% Hindu, 1.6% Muslim

* I took approximately 2 assemblies per term in this school in my role as local vicar

Teacher details

P1.1 - experienced teacher, Christian upbringing, now not a regular church-goer, but has a "Christian outlook on life"

P1.2 - experienced teacher, Church of Scotland upbringing, practising Christian

P1.3 - very experienced teacher, non-conformist upbringing as a young child, now "bits of humanist, agnostic, and sceptic"

HIGH SCHOOLS (denoted by the letter 'H' in the main text)

H1

School details

* county school

* age range 11-16

* 92% Asian background, mostly Muslim

* SACRE 'determination' granted

Teacher details

H1.1 - experienced teacher, Roman Catholic education, now a "lapsed RC"

H1.2 - experienced teacher, non-conformist upbringing, now an "agnostic"

H1.3 - younger teacher, practising Muslim

H2

School details

* county school

* age range 11-16

* approximately 20% Asian background, mainly Muslim and Hindu

Teacher details

H2.1 - experienced teacher, non-conformist upbringing, now "agnostic"

H2.2 - very experienced teacher, non-conformist upbringing, practising Christian

H2.3 - experienced teacher, Roman Catholic education, practising Catholic

H3

School details

* county school

* age range 11-16

* approximately 14% ethnic minority, mostly Muslim and Hindu

Teacher details

H3.1 - very experienced teacher, Christian upbringing, practising Christian

H3.2 - experienced teacher, practising Christian

H3.3 - young teacher, Christian upbringing, practising Christian

CHURCH HIGH SCHOOLS (denoted by the letters 'cH' in the main text)

cH1

School details

* voluntary aided (Roman Catholic)

* age range 11-18

* 98% from Catholic families

Teacher details

cH1.1 - experienced teacher, Roman Catholic upbringing, practising Catholic

cH1.2 - experienced teacher, Roman Catholic upbringing, practising Catholic

cH1.3 - very experienced teacher, Church of England upbringing, practising Anglican

cH1.4 - experienced teacher, attended Sunday School as a child, now nominal Church of England

Appendix 2

INITIAL LETTER TO HEADTEACHERS - JULY 1994

4th July 1994

I am writing to ask for your help with a research project which I am undertaking on a part-time basis at King's College, London. The subject of my study is 'Acts of Collective Worship in Schools': the full title and further details are given on the attached sheet.

I need the cooperation of about ten local schools (6/7 primary, 3 secondary) which between them give a representative sample of all the state schools in Luton. I have asked the advice of the Chief Education Officer and the County Inspector for Religious Education and they have expressed interest in my proposed study and have suggested some schools which I might approach. I hope to undertake the research in such a way that it will be of benefit to the participating schools and to schools in general.

A principal aim is to investigate current practice and, in particular, to try to analyse the underlying assumptions and thinking on which it is based. I would be very happy to come and talk with you or the appropriate member of your staff to provide further details and to discuss the possibility of your school being part of my research sample. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Cheetham

RESEARCH PROJECT BY REVD. R.I. CHEETHAM MA., (VICAR OF ST AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY, LIMBURY, LUTON).

M.Phil/Ph.D. Part-time at King's College, London. Department of Theology.

PROVISIONAL TITLE

The nature and status of religious belief in contemporary Britain (with particular reference to the concept of 'Truth') as reflected by Acts of Worship in schools since the 1988 Education Act.

AREA OF STUDY

The 1988 Education Act raised a sharp debate about 'Acts of Worship' in schools. It is my view that there is a great need to analyse both the current practice and the underlying assumptions of such Acts of Worship. They raise many profound issues for our society: how religious belief is regarded, especially in the 'public' domain (as opposed to a person's 'private' views); how we handle the multi-faith character of our country; whether or not worship is an appropriate activity for state schools; how a child's 'spiritual' character is properly developed etc.

For many children Acts of Worship in schools are their only experience of public worship: hence it is of crucial importance that this activity should be carried out in the best possible way and with a clear understanding of what is being done and why.

METHOD

I wish to observe Acts of Worship in a typical sample of Luton schools (about six primary and three secondary schools) and to discuss what takes place with those who lead them.

R.I. Cheetham

Appendix 3

INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. *Could you give a brief description of the school?*

   Probes...Type of school

   ... Age range

   ... Ethnic and religious background of pupils

   ... Other relevant features

2. *Could you describe the normal pattern for "Acts of Collective Worship"?*

3. *What is the school policy on Collective Worship?*

4. *Are there any particular issues or problems which arise for your school concerning Collective Worship?*

5. *Could you describe the attitudes to Collective Worship in the school among...*

   - *Staff?*
   - *Children?*
   - *Parents?*
   - *Govenors?*

6. *Are there any other important issues which we have not covered or comments you wish to make?*

Appendix 4

INITIAL INTERVIEW RESULTS

The initial interviews indicated a number of "live issues" for the schools and there was a high degree of convergence as to what those issues were.

Inclusiveness There was a very strong desire expressed in all the schools to keep the whole school together despite the manifold beliefs of pupils and staff. Several schools prided themselves on their ability to avoid exclusions from collective worship. Many mentioned their frustration and disappointment at failing to get the Jehovah's Witnesses' children to participate. This was an indication of the extremely high value placed by schools on enabling everyone to come together.

Part of the reason for valuing inclusiveness so highly was the perceived role of collective worship in building a sense of school community and belonging. Indeed, the word "community" was freqently used to describe the schools. "We work as a family" was one headteacher's comment.

The approach to the use of songs and hymns revealed the desire for inclusiveness. Some schools had gone through their hymn books and altered the words of well known songs to make them more widely acceptable, usually omitting the specific references to Jesus. Many schools preferred more general songs which have no particular religious reference. The main thing was that everyone could feel they could join in given that singing together is an important means by which a sense of community is built. However attitudes here were inconsistent as several schools would still sing quite specifically Christian songs if there was a good tune which the pupils enjoyed.

Affirmation of each person's integrity (teachers and pupils). There was a strong desire not to compromise anyone's beliefs. Attitudes of *tolerance and mutual respect* were

strongly encouraged. Part of the motivation for this seemed to be the desire to maintain a sense of school community. There was a deep desire *not to offend* anyone's religious sensibilities. This was well illustrated by the approach to *prayer.* Particular care was taken by most teachers to allow for an *open response*. A typical introduction would be "now we will have a time in which to think or pray" rather than the traditional and more prescriptive "let us pray". Most teachers saying prayers would keep them as general as possible i.e. addressed to God rather than Jesus. The way teachers handled the issue of prayer was highly significant and it was something that many mentioned as problematic. One junior headteacher saw prayer as a time of reflection in which prayer was possible, but not essential - each pupil could use the time in their own way.

Personal integrity was also illustrated by the emphasis of many teachers on encouraging pupils to reflect on their own values. There was a strong sense of each person as a unique individual whose right it is to work out their own attitudes and beliefs. Part of the school's task is to encourage such reflection.

Promoting the values and ethos of the school was seen by all schools as a central function of collective worship. There was much talk about "shared values" and "common ground." One headteacher spoke of creating a climate in which we "care for each other." The question of how these values were identified and agreed was not commented on in any depth: rather it seemed to be assumed that there are common values and everyone knows what they are.

Worship was considered deeply problematic by many, especially if it is defined as "Veneration of a divine Being" (DFE Circular 1/94). One high school teacher went so far as to say, "There are no acts of worship in this school." Another questioned whether explicit worship was possible in the high school context, and expressed considerable fears that many, if not most, staff would opt out if the religious side were to be given a higher profile. This negative attitude to explicit worship was less strong in the junior and infant

schools. The exceptions were the church schools as one would expect. For the Roman Catholic high school the teacher interviewed said that worship was "at the heart of the school."

Most schools were much happier with assemblies which contained ***moral messages.*** Several stressed this a crucial function of assemblies. One junior school headteacher spoke of "telling stories to encourage certain types of behaviour" - i.e. a quite deliberate attempt to mould and shape the children's moral outlook. One primary headteacher said that most of the assemblies were "moral" rather than "religious." One high school teacher emphasised that her choice of weekly themes for assembly was designed to aid reflection on common values in a "non-religious" way. There was to be "no preaching."

The ***teachers' beliefs and views*** emerged as a significant feature of what was done. In practice it was vital that the teacher leading an assembly felt "comfortable" with what was being said and done. This begs the question of how such judgements were being made, but there certainly seemed to be a high degree of subjectivity involved. This was neatly illustrated in the widespread practice of having a theme or thought for the week. Usually these themes are the product of a single teacher deciding what they thought might be interesting and appropriate. In addition some schools had the "problem" of over-zealous teachers with their own religious convictions which they expressed in the context of assembly in a style akin to "preaching" which most of their colleagues considered inappropriate. In one junior school where there was a very positive attitude to collective worship, 60-70% of the staff were committed Christians. The typical picture in the high schools was that the majority of the staff were not particularly religious and considered worship to be an imposition on the pupils and themselves. Many staff have grave reservations about the whole process of worship in schools.

The ***pupil's background*** was also a highly significant feature. Teachers were very aware of the cultural, religious and educational background. They were concerned to be

"relevant" i.e. to engage with questions in such a way that the pupils could relate to them from their own experience. They did not want to upset or offend any religious feelings of the pupils. Teachers were very aware of the need to deal with topics at a level which was appropriate for the children's age and stage of development. In particular several teachers questioned whether the issue of the "truth" of religious beliefs was appropriate at the primary stage.

There was ***relatively little input or comment from either parents or govenors*** about collective worship.

The ***legal framework*** was a concern to many schools and several, particularly the high schools, openly admitted their inability to comply with it.

The ***practical questions of space and accommodation*** were a real issue for high schools. It is physically impossible to get all the pupils together in the same hall at the same time. Often assembly has to take place in uncomfortable conditions with pupils sitting on the floor. In many primary schools the hall doubles up as gymnasium and dining room and noise from the nearby kitchen could occasionnally be heard during the assembly.

Most of the schools in the sample were in the ***process of thinking about collective worship and how they did it.*** Several had either recently written a policy or were about to. However, pressure of other work often meant that consideration of collective worship was often sidelined and given few resources for development. One high school teacher complained that in a recent 'Ofsted' report there were six action points of which collective worship was one. The other five had had sub-committees set up and considerable allocation of resources. For collective worship she was on her own. She felt this was an accurate reflection of the status of collective worship in the school. Despite this the amount of *planning and coordination* was undoubtedly increasing, largely as a result of the !988 Education Act and the Inspection process. One high school deputy

head said that there had been no coordination 4 years ago. Now they at least had weekly themes, rotas and a draft policy.

Attitudes to the variety of faiths and beliefs. There was little enthusiasm among staff for the promotion of any particular faith. Anything which came remotely near to indoctrination was firmly avoided. One junior school headteacher stressed that it is not the school's job to promote belief. Rather their role was to provide children with the basic experience and knowledge to enable them, at a later stage, to make their own decisions about matters of faith. A high school deputy headteacher said her school's aim was to encourage pupils to reflect on their own beliefs and values, but not to impose them on others.

However, many schools were very happy with the idea of the "celebration" of particular faiths. This was often done in an elaborate manner particularly at festival times. There would be, for example, assemblies on Divali, Christmas, Hannukah etc, which highlighted and affirmed the religious beliefs of that particular group of pupils without assuming they were held by all. Part of the reason for this was an educational one: to extend the children's awareness of different beliefs and so, in the words of one junior school headteacher, "enable a promotion of interfaith respect based upon sharing". (In his school the children were almost entirely from Muslim backgrounds and suffered from what he called "narrow faith interpretations".) There is clearly an issue about the difference between education and nurture.

Many teachers adopted a strategy of looking for what they called the *"common ground"* between religions. They focused on the similarities and common themes. One junior school headteacher called this "essential truth".

Another strategy for dealing with the variety of faiths was simply to say "Christians believe," or "Muslims believe," treating these as statements of fact and making no

evaluative comment about the beliefs concerned i.e. reflecting the phenomenological approach to Religious Education. One junior school head put it this way - "If we are Muslims then Allah wants us to be good Muslims; if we are Christians then God wants us to be good Christians." Another tells his children, "We can call God what we choose - Allah, God, Jehovah." One infant school headteacher was keen to affirm each person's background and beliefs. This seems to treat the different faiths as almost entirely separate and discrete and to imply that religious belief is private, subjective and relative.

Appendix 5

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE - REVIEW SHEET FOR AN ACT OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

DETAILS

School ..... Leader .....

Group ..... Teachers present .....

No. of children ..... Date .....

Age range ..... Time ..... Length .....

Religious background of pupils .....

.....

CONTENT

FORMAT
Visual aids

Verbal

Story/Use of holy books

Drama

Participation by children

Music/Hymns

Prayer/Use of silence

Other

AIM

Observer's view

Leader's view

Participant's view

REFERENCES TO RELIGIOUS BELIEF

Explicit

Implicit

OTHER COMMENTS

Appendix 6

THE LIKERT-TYPE SCALE USED FOR THE 'KEY INDICATORS'

Prayer

1. A prayer addressed to God with no introduction other than, 'Let us pray' - with an underlying assumption that all would join in.
2. A prayer addressed to God with an introduction such as, 'I am going to say a Christian prayer. You may like to join in with the prayer or just listen to the words.'
3. A meditation or thought offered for silent reflection.
4. A period of silent reflection with little direction on its use other than to reflect on what has been said in the assembly.
5. No prayer or time of reflection at all.

Hymns or songs

1. A specific Christian song or hymn, or song from another faith, introduced without comment as to its origin and not altered.
2. As (1) above, but with an introduction saying, 'This is a Christian song.'
3. A Christian song which has been altered in some way (e.g. to avoid references to Jesus as Lord) to make it more widely acceptable.
4. A general song with no explicit religious reference.
5. No songs at all in the assembly.

References to religious belief

1. Religious statements made without qualification or introduction e.g. 'God created us and loves us'.
2. Similar statements, but with the introduction, 'Christians etc believe . . .'
3. Statements about the leader's own beliefs - 'I believe that . . .', which do not assume similar beliefs on the part of others.
4. Implicit, but unacknowledged references to religious belief.
5. No references to religious belief.

Use of Holy Books

1. A Bible story introduced without introduction, assuming that the Bible is 'our book'.
2. A story from a holy book with an introduction as to its provenance.
3. A story from a holy book with no acknowledgement of its provenance.
4. A theme implicitly based on a story or passage from a holy book, but with no acknowledgement or explanation.
5. No references to holy books.

Appendix 7

PILOT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

School .....

Teacher / leader .....

Date .....

At start explain purpose of interview to explore the teacher's understanding of collective worship especially the one just observed.

Nothing will be attributed by name or school.

Ask permission to tape record and to take notes.

QUESTIONS

1. Would you tell me how you personally feel about Acts of Collective Worship in schools?

2. How were your views illustrated in today's Act of Worship?
   (probe: What are the key features of a typical Act of Worship led by you?)

3. What was the aim of today's Act of Worship?

4. What are the major influences on the way you lead collective worship?
   (probes: religious background, age aptitude of pupils; the law; the school policy; your religious beliefs; your view of education; of collective worship)

5. Was this Act of Worship typical of the ones you lead?

6. How did you prepare for this Act of Worship?
   (probes: what resources were used? Source of subject matter and material?)

7. What use do you make of . . .

   - prayers and silent reflection

   - hymns and music

   - language which expresses religous commitment

   - symbols and visual aids

   (probe: what are the problems associated with these?)

8. How do you interpret the phrase 'Collective Worship'?

9. How do you cope with the competing truth claims of different religions?

10. Were there any unusual influences on today's Act of Worship?
    (probe: effect of my presence?)

Appendix 8

MAIN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

School .....

Teacher / leader .....

Date .....

At start explain purpose of interview to explore the teacher's understanding of collective worship especially the one just observed.

Nothing will be attributed by name or school.

Ask permission to tape record and to take notes.

QUESTIONS

1. Would you tell me how you personally feel about Acts of Collective Worship in schools?

2. What are the main reasons for having Collective Worship in your school?

3. How were your views illustrated in today's Act of Worship?
   (probes: what are the key features of a typical Act of Worship led by you?)

4. What was the aim of today's Act of Worship?

5. Was today's Act of Worship typical of the ones you lead?

6. What are the major influences on the way you lead collective worship?
   Probes:
   - religious background of the pupils

   - age, aptitude of pupils

   - the law

   - the school policy

   - your religious beliefs

   - your view of education

   - your view of collective worship

7. How did you prepare for this Act of Worship?
   (probes: what resources were used? Source of subject matter and material?)

8. What use do you make of . . .

   - prayers and silent reflection

   - hymns and music

   - readings from holy books, e.g. the Bible, the Koran

   - symbols and visual aids

   (probes: what are the problems associated with these? how do you normally introduce prayers and hymns?)

9. How do you interpret the phrase 'Collective Worship'?

10. How do you cope with the fact that a variety of religions and world-views are represented among pupils and staff at an Act of Collective Worship?

(probe: do you see the different views as . . .

- pointing to a common truth
- all true in their own way)

11. How would you handle an assembly on a subject where the major religions and world views took different viewpoints?

e.g. Christmas - the incarnation and the status of Jesus as God.
Easter and its meaning.
The existence and nature of God.

(probe: Would you - avoid such controversies
- look only for common ground
- describe the different views and make no other comment
- put forward one of the views as the true one
- adopt another policy)

12. Were there any unusual influences on today's Act of Worship?

(probe: effect of my presence?)

Appendix 9

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE (for research by R.I.Cheetham)

NAME..... SCHOOL.....

1. **Your background**

1.1 What were the main subjects which you studied at college/university prior to becoming a teacher?

.....

.....

1.2 How many years have you been teaching?.....

1.3 What were the main reasons you entered the teaching profession?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

1.4 Please give a brief summary of your teaching experience. i.e. posts held and dates.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

1.5 What is your current position in the school?.....

.....

1.6 What is your age?.....

1.7 How many years have you been leading assemblies?.....

1.8 How often do you lead assemblies?.....

1.9 What training have you received in leading assemblies?.....

.....

.....

.....

1.10 Which of the following would best describe your religious/world views?

* Committed member of a religious faith..... ☐

Please specify which religious faith.....

* Humanist..... ☐

* Agnostic..... ☐

* Atheist..... ☐

* Other..... ☐

Please specify.....

1.11 Please describe briefly whether or not you were brought up in any particular religious faith/world view.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2. Please write below your comments on the "Emerging Themes" in the attached "Summary" paper.

3. Please write below your comments on the "Tentative Hypotheses" in the attached "Summary" paper.

4. How would you describe the approach you take (when leading Collective Worship) to the diversity of religious and other world views?

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
All true in their own way	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
All searching for a common truth.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Some views contain more truth than others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The question of the "truth" of particular views is meaningless.i.e. religions are neither true nor false, just different.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The question of the "truth" of particular views is best avoided in Collective Worship.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The question of the "truth" of particular views is unimportant in Collective Worship.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. Does your personal opinion as an individual on the "truth" of religious and other world views match the approach you take as a teacher when leading Collective Worship?.....

If they are different please say why.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

6. Any other comments?

PLEASE RETURN TO RICHARD CHEETHAM IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED, PREFERABLY BY FRIDAY 24TH OCTOBER, OR BY FRIDAY 7TH NOVEMBER AT THE LATEST. THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.

Appendix 9

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE - COVERING LETTER

215 Icknield Way
Luton LU3 2JR

9th October 1997

Dear

Thank you very much for the help you have given me to date in my Ph.D. research into Collective Worship in Luton schools.

I have now completed all the main interviews (approximately 3 per school in 12 schools) and some very interesting themes are emerging. Several of those interviewed have asked for some feedback - and so I have produced an Interim Summary which is enclosed.

Due to the nature of the emerging themes it will be extremely helpful to me to have your views not only on the general themes and hypotheses, but also on some particular aspects. To this end I have devised a short questionnaire which is also enclosed.
I would be most grateful if you could spare the time to complete this questionnaire and return it to me in the envelope provided, preferably by Friday 24th October, or by Friday 7th November at the latest.

Any information you give me will be treated in confidence in that its source (both school and teacher) will not be identified in my research writing.

My hope is that the ideas from the research (which are based on the views of the teachers interviewed) will be of assistance to schools in the practice of Collective Worship.

Thank you, once again, for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Cheetham

Appendix 10

INTERIM SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

1. **The aim of the research**

My research aims to investigate the understanding of religious belief which underlies the current practice of Collective Worship in schools, especially given the religious diversity of contemporary Britain.

2. **Brief overview of the work to date**

The research is based on a sample of 12 schools in Luton which between them cover the statutory schooling ages (5-16) and contain a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. The sample makes no pretence at being random, but is broadly representative of Luton.

In each school I have observed several assemblies and conducted three main interviews with teachers who lead Collective Worship.

3. **The current situation**

I have now completed all the Main Interviews and done some preliminary analysis. Several themes have emerged which are of considerable interest. At this stage of the research it is extremely useful to get the reactions of the teachers interviewed to the themes which I have identified to see what sense, if any, they make of them.

THE EMERGING THEMES

1. **Inclusivity**

There was a very strong desire expressed in all the schools to keep the whole school together for assembly despite the manifold beliefs of pupils and staff. All the teachers interviewed wanted an occasion which can bind the whole school together and in which everyone can participate no matter what their beliefs or background.

This desire for inclusivity was revealed in many ways:

- The perceived role of Collective Worship in building a sense of School Community and belonging. Indeed the word "community" was frequently used to describe the school.
- Collective Worship was seen by many teachers as a key way of promoting the values and ethos of the school. There was much talk about "shared values".
- Many teachers stressed the finding of common ground on which everyone could stand rather than highlighting differences.
- Most teachers saw the diversity of beliefs as something which should not only be recognised, but also "celebrated" in a positive manner. There was a strong emphasis on developing attitudes of mutual understanding, tolerance and respect.
- The strong wish of teachers to make the assembly an occasion which is both accessible and relevant to the children.

2. **Personal Integrity and Freedom of Choice**

There was a very strong desire not to compromise anyone's beliefs. Great care was taken to allow an "open" response to what was being said or done in Collective Worship, and not to presume anything, at least in terms of religious belief, on behalf of those present.

Many teachers saw part of the school's educational task as encouraging pupils to reflect on their own values. There was a strong sense of each person as a unique individual whose right it is to work out their own attitudes and beliefs. All the teachers interviewed had a profound dislike of the idea of indoctrination, and were very careful in the way they conducted assembly so as to avoid such a charge.

There was a deep desire not to offend or to cause any unnecessary upset. Teachers were very aware that they may unwittingly offend pupils' religious sensibilities through lack of detailed knowledge on their own part, and this caused them to be very cautious in what they said.

3. **General "moral" assemblies are much less problematic that "religous" assemblies.**
Most teachers expressed a strong preference for assemblies which focused on a moral theme rather than a religious one. This was particularly so in the High Schools. Worship was considered deeply problematic, especially if it is defined as "Veneration of a divine Being" (Circular 1/94). This negative attitude to worship was less strong in the Infant and Junior schools. The exceptions were the church schools as one would expect.

Most schools were much happier with assemblies which contained moral messages. Several stressed this as a crucial function of assemblies. One teacher said that most of the assemblies were "moral" rather than "religious", and another teacher emphasised that the choice of weekly themes for assembly was designed to aid reflection on common values in a "non-religious" way. Very often teachers seemed quite at ease with the idea of moulding and shaping the moral outlook of the children.

This was in sharp contrast with the attitude to religious beliefs where the fear of indoctrination and preaching seemed very deep. There was little enthusiasm among teachers for the promotion of any particular faith. Several stressed that it is not the school's job to promote belief. Rather their role was to provide children with the basic experience and knowledge to enable them, at an appropriate stage, to make their own informed decisions about matters of faith.

4. **The influence of the teacher's beliefs and views**
It has become clear from the interviews that a tremendous amount depends upon the views and attitudes of the teacher leading the assembly. It is their judgement which really counts concerning what is done. In practice, it is vital that the teacher leading the assembly feels "comfortable" with what is being put across.
Many teachers spoke of the influence of their own personal beliefs on the way in which they conducted assembly. All of them wanted to avoid the charge of indoctrination and

were very aware that they should not abuse their position, and yet many acknowledged that what they did was deeply affected by their own basic beliefs.

TENTATIVE HYPOTHESES

On the basis of the preliminary analysis carried out to date I propose six tentative hypotheses:

1. **The demand for inclusivity and integrity means that the question of the "truth" of religious belief is either avoided or suppressed in the context of Collective Worship.**

Diversity of beliefs is acknowedged, but no evaluative comments are made.

2. **The freedom of the individual to choose their religious beliefs is paramount in the way in which Collective Worship is conducted. The idea of Christian nurture, which many see as implicitly underlying the 1944 Education Act, has almost completely gone.**

3. **There is a real perceived need to create a common ethos and sense of belonging in the school context.**

Alongside the stress on the freedom of the individual there was a complementary need to stress the school community and ethos. Many teachers saw Collective Worship as having a crucial role in building up both the sense of belonging together (we are not just isolated individuals) and a common code of behaviour. i.e. The social function of the School Assembly is the most important one.

4. **Underlying Collective Worship is an attitude of relativism towards religious belief, but one of absolutism towards moral behaviour.**

Many teachers spoke of religious belief in terms of, "It's true for you". A very common approach was to preface any comments about religious belief with the words, "Christians

believe.....", or "Hindus believe....", or even ,"I believe.....". No evaluative comments are usually made about the beliefs in question.

When it came to ethical behaviour the teachers were much more prepared to admit an agenda which aimed at producing certain types of behaviour. It did not seem to be an open question as to whether bullying, for example, was simply that pupils preferred way of behaving: it was wrong.

5. **It is the teacher's subjective judgement which is the most important factor in determining what happens in Collective Worship.**

The teacher who leads the Collective Worship has to feel comfortable with what is being done. They are by far the most significant influence. They draw on their own experience and background for material. They are often deeply influenced by their own basic beliefs and values, not in a crude way of seeking to indoctrinate the children, but in a more subtle way in that if they are not "comfortable" with what is being done then it will not happen. In a nutshell, in the absence of any over-riding value or belief system which is broadly accepted by all, the teachers have been put in the position of having to be arbiters of what happens: their judgement is the critical factor.

6. **Teachers have developed a variety of tactics for dealing with the variety of beliefs in the context of Collective Worship.**

These include:

* Avoidance, especially of areas of potential conflict between beliefs. There was a strong fear of causing unnecessary offence or upset. Teachers also often spoke of their lack of detailed knowledge of different religions which made them hesitant in saying anything about them for fear of getting it wrong.

* Focusing on the moral issues rather than beliefs. (Is this a version of avoidance?)

* Seeing their role as promoting awareness of the diversity of beliefs so that the children could make their own informed judgement at an appropriate stage. The teachers avoided

making judgements between belief systems. (i.e. reflecting the phenomenological approach to teaching Religious Education which stresses the neutrality of the teacher in matters of religious belief, at least in the school context.)

* Always prefacing comments about religious belief by, "Christians believe....." etc. i.e. making it clear that such beliefs are not being presumed upon the whole population.

* Allowing an "open" response to what is said or done in Collective Worship.

* Looking for common ground between the different beliefs. Underlying this sometimes was the belief that the different religions were different paths seeking the same goal. One teacher called this "essential truth".

* Promoting attitudes of mutual understanding, respect and tolerance for the diversity of beliefs.

Appendix 11

'GATEKEEPER' QUESTIONNAIRE

Please return this form to Richard Cheetham in the S.A.E. provided. Thank you.

1. **How and why did you choose the teachers whom I interviewed?**
   (e.g. experience, availability, willingness to be interviewed etc.)

2. **By what process was the school policy on Collective Worship produced?**

* Who decided to produce one?

* Who drafted it?

* By whom was it discussed?

* Which group(s) authorised and approved it? (e.g. staff, govenors)

* Any other relevant comments?

Appendix 11

'GATEKEEPER' COVERING LETTER

St.Augustine's Vicarage
215 Icknield Way
Luton LU3 2JR

Tel. 572415

23rd February 1998

I am hoping to write up my Ph.D. thesis on Collective Worship this coming autumn when I have a period of sabbatical leave. In order to do this I need two small pieces of final information from the schools which have been kind enough to be part of this study. I shall be very grateful for your assistance in this matter - it should only take a very few minutes of your time.

The first piece of information needed is a brief comment on **how and why you selected those whom I interviewed.**

The second is a brief comment on **the process by which the school policy on Collective Worship was produced.**

Attached is a sheet of paper for your comments on these matters. I shall be very grateful if you could complete it and return it in the S.A.E. provided.

In addition, if your school has had an Ofsted Report in the last year I would be very grateful for a copy of any comments it may contain about Collective Worship, Spiritual and Moral Development, and R.E.

I hope when the research is completed to be able to feed something useful back into the schools which have helped - and I intend to produce a short report for you.

Thank you for your help,

Yours sincerely,

Richard Cheetham

Appendix 12

LIST OF OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS RELATED TO COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Full details of some of the following documents also appear in the Bibliography and if they are listed there under a different heading it is clearly indicated in this appendix.

Documents from individual schools
Policy documents for Collective Worship, R.E., P.S.E., and Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) Development.

School prospectus

Lists of assembly themes and rotas

SACRE determination application (where applicable)

OFSTED reports

Government and quasi-government documents
1944 Education Act

1988 Education Reform Act

1993 Education Act

DES: Circular 3/89

DFE: Circular 1/94

DfEE: Choice and Diversity, 1992

National Curriculum Council:
Spiritual and Moral Development discussion paper, April 93
(re-issued by SCAA, 1995)

Schools Curriculum Assessment Authority (SCAA):
Spiritual and Moral Development - Discussion paper No. 3 - 1995
Analysis of SACRE reports 1995
Education for Adult Life: the Spiritual and Moral Development of Young People - Discussion paper No. 6 - 1996
Analysis of SACRE reports 1996
Analysis of SACRE reports 1997

SCAA / National Forum for Values in Education:
Consultation on values in education and the community, 1996
SCAA statement on shared moral values, 1996

Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED):
Religious Education and Collective Worship 1992-3
Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development 1994 - an OFSTED discussion paper
Religious Education - A Review of Inspection findings 93/94
OFSTED Handbooks - Guidance on the Inspection of Nursery and Primary Schools, 1995 and Guidance on the Inspection of Secondary Schools 1995
Secondary Education 1993-97
Standards in Primary Religious Education 1998

Local authority documents

Bedfordshire Education Service:
Religious Education - A planning Guide, 1985
Guidelines for writing a school collective worship policy, 1995
* Assembly, 1985
* Planning Primary R.E., 1985
* Collective Worship, 1989
(* listed under Gregory, Rachel)
Bedfordshire County Education Service - SACRE documents

Birmingham City Council Education Department:
Collective Worship in Birmingham, Policy Guidelines for County Schools and Colleges, 1993

Hertfordshire Education Service:
Collective Worship in Hertfordshire, Guidance for Schools, 1989
Collective Worship in Herfordshire, 1995

Luton Education Committee:
Summary of OFSTED reports (secondary) 93-97
Luton MERC - Collective Worship, Inset Reference Paper 1997
Luton SACRE documents (various)

Norfolk County Council:
Good Practice in Collective Worship

NFER Survey of LEAs and SACREs (extracts)

Suffolk County Council Education Department:
Guidelines for Collective Worship in a plural society, 1995

National Association of SACREs:
Policy Statement on Collective Worship, 1995

Documents from teachers' and professional organisations

Association of Christian Teachers:
Briefing Paper -School Assembly and the Christian Teacher, 1990
Christian Manifesto for Education, 1995
Guidelines for celebrating Christmas in Schools, 1997

Association of Teachers and Lecturers:
Collective Worship: Policy and Practice - Throwing out the baby with the bathwater? 1995

Christian Education Movement:
A guide to inter-faith relationships in schools (1996)

Culham College Institute:
Christianity in R.E. programme, 1989
Religious Education and Collective Worship in Primary Schools, 1992

National Association of Head Teachers:
Religious Education in Schools, 1985
Survey on Religious Education and Collective Worship, 1994
Policy Statement on Collective Worship, 1995

National Union of Teachers:
Guidance and Information for teacher governors, headteachers and school representatives on the 1988 ERA on Religious Education and Collective Worship 1989
National Union of Teachers comment on the DFE consultative document 'Religious Education and Collective Worship', September 1992
Draft DFE Circular on 'Religious Education and Collective Worship' - response from the National Union of Teachers, December 1993
Collective Worship Reviewed. Comments from the National Union of Teachers, February 1998

Professional Council for Religious Education:
Religious Education and Collective Worship - A guide for teachers, governors, parents and members of SACREs, 1994

R.E. Council in England and Wales:
Collective Worship in Schools, 1996
Collective Worship Reviewed, 1998

Secondary Heads Association:
Managing Collective Worship, 1990 (listed under Miles, Grahame)
A SHA perspective on Collective Worship, 1996 by Colin Broomfield, Head Cheshunt School
'Thought for the day' - a scheme for spiritual reflection in schools, 1995 (listed under Douglas, Bruce)

Documents from Churches or Christian groups

Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education:
Collective Worship in Schools - a discussion paper, 1995

British Council of Churches:
Worship in Education, 1989

Catholic Education Service (Education Agency of the Bishops' Conference):
Spiritual and Moral Development across the curriculum, 1995
Learning from OFSTED and Diocesan Inspections, 1996
The Common Good in Education, 1997

Christian Action Research and Education (CARE):
Policy Statement on Religious Education and Collective Worship, 1995

Churches' Joint Education Policy Committee (CJEPC):
Collective Worship in Schools, November 1995

Free Churches' Federal Council:
Collective Worship in Council Schools - A guide to principals and practice for staff, governors and other interested persons, 1990

National Society:
School Worship, 1989
* The Multi-Faith Church School, 1992
* Primary School Worship, 1992
Religious Education, 1992
Open the Door (listed under Barton et al)
The Church School, 1990 (listed under Duncan)
* Spiritual Development in Schools
* Between a Rock and a Hard Place
(* listed under Brown, Alan)

Newcastle Diocesan Education Board:
Religious Education and Collective Worship, 1989

St Albans Diocesan Board of Education:
Policy statement - teachers' guidelines for aided schools, 1993

Documents from other faith and secular groups

British Humanist Association:
Policy statement - School Assemblies - or Collective Worship? (1996)

Inter-Faith Network for the U.K.:
Statement on Inter-Religious Relations in Britain, 1991
The Quest for Common Values, 1997

Muslim Education Forum:
Collective Worship in state funded schools, 1997

Muslim Educational Trust:
* The Education Reform Act, 1988. What can Muslims do? (1989)
* British Muslims and Schools, 1994
Collective Worship - the Muslim perspective, 1995
Education in Multi-Faith Britain - Meeting the needs of Muslims, 1995
(* listed under Sarwar, Ghulam in Bibliography)

Appendix 13

EXAMPLES OF WEEKLY THEMES AS USED IN SOME SAMPLE SCHOOLS

High Schools

H1
New beginnings
Harvest Festival
Birth of Guru Nanak
Influence
Christmas
Personal Values
Ramadam
Equal Opportunities (World Day for Women)
Easter
Hajj and Pilgrimages
Decisions
Islamic New Year
Patience
Working for each other

H2
Are you listening?
Food for thought (Harvest)
Method in my madness
Bridges
Burnt fingers
A bit of Christmas spirit
Real cool
The outsider
A Matter of life and death
In the light of experience
Patterns
And now for the good news .....!

H3
The Start of the Race
The Dream
Harvest celebration - what on earth are you doing?
Under the skin
It's the thought that counts
Beneath the tinsel
I believe
Spring cleaning
Good and Evil
Resurrection
Living as a family
Imagine
Learning from experience
Work

Rewards

Junior Schools

J1
Being brave
Taking responsibility for mistakes
Harvest
Divali
Remembrance
Birthday of Guru Nanak
Dishonesty
Advent
Christmas
Responsibility
Ramadan
Talking
Mothers' Day
Sacrifice
Listening to parents
Eid
Cruelty to animals

J2
Children of Albania
Luton Christian Fellowship
Saying 'thank you'
Yom Kippur - saying sorry
Love - God is Love
Divali lights
Hospitals
The real meaning of Christmas
Advent
Resolutions
The power of prayer
The beginning of Ramadan - giving up - why?
Jesus' sacrifice
St Valentine
The Joy of Festivals
Love your neighbour
Easter
Rama Navami and Annunciation

J3
The importance of books - link to Ramadan and the Qu'ran
Understanding
Confucius
Eid
People who help us
Sharing
Communication
Friends
April fools!

J4
Each day different
Persistence
Light
Families
Promises
Listening
Common sense
Neighbours
Spring
Easter

Primary School

P1
Caring for others
Courage
Autumn / Harvest
Stories from Sacred Books
Special Days
Winter / Christmas
Worth / Value
Friends and Enemies
Animals
Spring
Easter
Working together
Bible stories
People
Sport
Summer holidays

Infant School

I2
Me
My clothes
My family
Divali story
My school
Festivals and celebrations
Christmas story
Friend
Teacher
School Crossing Lady
Easter Story
Caring for our school
Caring for the countryside
Thinking about the effects of pollution
Greek myth - Arion and the dolphin
One more step

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